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The Reluctant Learner

A Research Report on Nonparticipation and Dropout in Literacy Programs in British Columbia

Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology

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Adult Basic Education

THE RELUCTANT LEARNER

A Research Report on Nonparticipation and Dropout in Literacy Programs in British Columbia

Prepared for the
Province of British Columbia
Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology

and the

National Literacy Secretariat
Department of the Secretary of State of Canada

by Audrey M. Thomas

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Audrey M. Thomas
Victoria, March 1990

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

The aim of this project was to explore reasons for nonparticipation in ABE Literacy programs and reasons for dropout from such programs in British Columbia. Literature was reviewed, opinions were sought from ABE professionals and other field workers. Seven literacy classes were visited in order to speak with the participants, sixty-six persons from several different locales in the province were personally interviewed by the writer, and two telephone surveys provided a combined interview sample of another fifty-six persons.

Very little research has been done on these topics in Canada. Much of the literature is U.S. based and fairly recent. The distinctive characteristics of the ABE target population often mean that the usual research approaches do not work. The studies on participation have looked at motivation, deterrents or barriers, and most recently at the phenomenon of avoidance or resistance. Much of the research has produced typologies of the target population. Researchers have stressed that the undereducated population should not be regarded as a homogeneous mass. Distinct subgroups exist and it is important to keep them in mind when planning recruitment drives and developing instructional strategies.

Among avoiders or resisters, the evidence suggests that low perceived need, and negative attitudes towards school prevail. These people have their own value systems and are not necessarily against learning per se, but they are not aware of how ABE programs differ from their past experiences and thus have some erroneous perceptions and assumptions. These people are often quite talented in other ways.

Barriers to participation appear to be predominantly related to economic causes. Among dropouts, work and family-related reasons appear to dominate as causes for withdrawal.

Much of the research on program attrition has produced contradictory and inconclusive findings. This area of research is beset by problems of definition and the heterogeneity of the ABE population. The "dropouts" or withdrawals in this study could just as easily be called "dropins" as many of them had a history of

returning to ABE. In the telephone survey of a specific program, the reasons for withdrawal were non-program-related and over 80 percent of those contacted said they would go back to the program if conditions were right. The positive attitude towards ABE programs among dropouts has been noted in some U.S. research as well. The intentions to return to ABE have implications for recruitment and waitlists.

Some of the major findings of the project are:

1. A recruitment thrust with a single message is unlikely to reach the bulk of nonparticipants any more than a single program delivery approach or any one instructional strategy can be applied to all adult participants.

2. People in this target population have often experienced chaotic lives. It is only when everything falls in place and the necessary supports are available that there is a reasonable chance of adults succeeding in their goals. If supports are not in place, the less motivated and curiosity-seekers soon drop out.

3. The main means of hearing about ABE literacy programs is word-of-mouth. Door-to-door advertising and brochures for children to take home from school have worked with school district programs.

4. Wide-scale recruitment is useless unless it is accompanied by the provision of a wide range of programs offering flexible schedules in accessible locations.

5. Many adults require bridging opportunities such as one-to-one tutoring or work in a learning centre with individual help before enrolling in regular college ABE classes. These programs show adults that they can learn and can build up their self-esteem and confidence. In college settings, programs with a strong life skills component combined with the academic skills are often necessary before a person can go on to academic literacy classes or vocational training.

6. Adult learners stressed the importance of peer counselling and tutoring and requested more help with the transitions from one program to another. Such

strategies are important in both recruitment and retention of learners. Some short training programs may be required and need to be developed for such peer helpers.

7. There needs to be more sensitivity training and awareness of the issues faced by low-literate adults among front-line institutional and government workers.

8. There has to be better provision of diagnostic services and counselling for learning disabled adults. This is an important subgroup in the target population. Specialized tutor-training will be necessary if tutorial programs are to help these people. Learning disabled adults also require the use of alternative instructional techniques and aids to help them learn in the way best suited to their learning styles.

9. Many low-literate adults are realistic. They know that it will be a long-haul to obtain any kind of credential. They also know that the job opportunities are very limited in many of their communities. They need jobs or trades training which do not demand inflated credentials. It takes an extremely heroic, determined person to continue in ABE, given the current circumstances.

10. With the abolition of tuition costs for ABE in school district programs, there may be surges of enrollment at the beginning of courses with subsequent decline in numbers as the "curiosity-seekers" do not return. Such activity can place added burdens on ABE personnel. A small registration fee, as a demonstration of commitment was suggested by some learners and practitioners.

11. Many learners use community-based programs and school district programs as bridges into college programs. As the former increase and if a provincial recruitment thrust develops, there will likely be increased pressure on college waitlists.

12. Learners enjoy coming to ABE literacy programs. The experience is often very different from what they had imagined. They enjoy learning at their own pace, but some need extra help and others need more stimulation in the self-paced classroom. Group and social interaction should not be ignored. Learning assistants, aides, or tutors may be needed to help the instructor. Some learners need longer than others to reach their goals. Timetabling should be flexible to allow learners to take the time required in order to succeed. Learners need to see that progress is being made.

13. Follow-up of persons who withdraw from classes should be conducted by someone on behalf of the program. The reasons for withdrawal are then documented and the learner knows someone cares and is more motivated to return when circumstances change.

14. There needs to be more research on a range of issues related to the adult low-literate population in British Columbia. There also needs to be more discussion on the use of terms such as "success" and "attrition" in ABE literacy programs. The fact that a "dropout" participated at all, could be seen as a success and may hold hope for the future. Such messages need to be heeded by administrators and decision makers.

I. INTRODUCTION

This project had its genesis in the work of the Provincial Literacy Advisory Committee (PLAC). The Committee was appointed by the Honourable Stanley Hagen in September 1988 when he was Minister of Advanced Education and Job Training and Minister Responsible for Science and Technology. The Report of the Provincial Literacy Advisory Committee was delivered to the Honourable Bruce Strachan, the new Minister of Advanced Education, Training and Technology in December 1989. The report identified at least two areas requiring further research: (a) reasons for nonparticipation in literacy programs, and (b) explanation of attrition rates (p. 50).

In British Columbia, 929,140 persons or two out of five British Columbians 15 years of age and over had no secondary diploma or certificate according to the 1986 Census. Of this total, 256,800 persons have less than a Grade 9 education. According to the Southam Survey (1987), 360,000 British Columbians cannot read, write or use numbers well enough to cope with the demands of contemporary society. This society is one which is rapidly changing in response to technological innovations which are causing restructuring of both the workplace and the marketplace. One manifestation of these changes is the unemployment rate. Another is the labour force participation rate. Table 1 compares these rates for Canada and British Columbia in 1979, while Table 2 compares the 1988 figures for Canada and British Columbia.

TABLE 1. Canadian and British Columbian Labour Force by Educational Attainment, 1979 Annual Average

Schooling	Population 15 years and over	Participation Rate	Unemployment Rate
Canada-all levels	17,691,000	63.3	7.5
0-8 years	4,226,000	44.8	8.8
High school	9,136,000	65.9	8.5
Some post-secondary	1,279,000	71.0	6.7
Post secondary certificate or diploma	1,664,000	74.0	5.1
University degree	1,385,000	83.3	3.3
British Columbia-all levels	1,949,000	62.7	7.7
0-8 years	293,000	40.4	8.9
High school	1,107,000	63.4	8.9
Some post-secondary	189,000	70.7	6.3
Post-secondary certificate or diploma	181,000	70.8	5.1
University degree	178,000	78.9	4.3

Source: Statistics Canada, The Labour Force, Catalogue No. 71-001 Monthly. December 1979. Ottawa.

TABLE 2. **Canadian and British Columbian Labour Force by Educational Attainment, 1988**

Schooling	Population 15 Yrs. & Over	Labour Force Total	Labour Force Employed	Participation Rate %	Unemployment Rate %	Employment/ Population Ratio
Canada–all levels	20,189,000	13,291,000	12,305,000	66.8	7.4	61.6
0-8 years	3,453,000	1,283,000	1,142,000	37.1	11.0	33.1
High school	9,706,000	6,464,000	5,889,000	66.6	8.9	60.7
Some post-secondary	1,943,000	1,362,000	1,270,000	70.1	6.8	65.3
Post-secondary certificate or diploma	2,732,000	2,170,000	2,063,000	79.4	4.9	75.5
University degree	2,355,000	2,011,000	1,942,000	85.4	3.5	82.5
British Columbia-all levels	2,341,000	1,507,000	1,351,000	64.4	10.4	57.7
0-8 years	257,000	90,000	76,000	35.0	15.9	29.4
High school	1,224,000	776,000	680,000	63.4	12.4	55.5
Some post-secondary	277,000	185,000	164,000	66.9	11.1	59.4
Post-secondary certificate or diploma	305,000	232,000	219,000	76.2	5.8	71.8
University degree	279,000	224,000	212,000	80.5	5.5	76.1

Source: Statistics Canada. The Labour Force. Catalogue No. 71-001 Monthly. December 1988. Ottawa.

TABLE 3. Population 15 Years and Over with 0-8 Years Schooling, 1988

Characteristic	B. C. %	Canada %
Labour Force Participation Rate	35.0	37.1
Unemployment Rate	15.9	11.0
Employment to Population Ratio	29.4	33.1

Source: TABLE 2 above

A comparison of Tables 1 and 2 shows that although the unemployment rates for Canada in 1979 and 1988 are about the same, the level of participation in the labour force is higher in 1988 for the country as a whole. Also apparent are the improved levels of educational attainment among the general population. The picture for the least educated group, however, is bleaker. In 1988, the participation rate is lower and the level of unemployment is higher than in 1979. Although the absolute numbers in this cohort have declined, there are still about 1 in 6 persons in Canada in this least educated group. Their prospects for the future are not good.

The statistics for British Columbia reveal some interesting situations. While the participation and unemployment rates for the province as a whole in 1979 are about on a par with the overall national rates, the province has a lower participation rate and a considerably higher unemployment rate in 1988, reflecting how the mainly resource-dependent province has been adversely affected by the prevailing economic conditions. In 1979, the rates of participation are markedly below the national averages for the 0 - 8 years cohort and the university degree cohort. And, the provincial unemployment rate for those with a university degree is considerably higher than the national average. In 1988, the participation rates for all cohorts in the province are markedly lower than national averages and the unemployment rates are considerably higher for all cohorts in the province, but especially for the least educated group. This group represents 1 in 9 persons in the province and Table 3 shows the relative position of this group vis a vis national averages. Overall, the statistics clearly show the advantage of education in terms of higher labour force participation rates and lower unemployment rates. The least educated persons are the most disadvantaged - their chances of participating in the labour force are fewer and if they do participate they are more vulnerable to unemployment. Predictions point to a worsening scenario for this group. (See also Thomas 1989b.)

The *Workforce 2000* study of the Hudson Institute (1987) predicts that more than half of the jobs created in the U.S.A. between now and the year 2000 will require education beyond the high school level and that one-third will be filled by college graduates. Higher levels in language, mathematics and reasoning skills will be required and many jobs in the least-skilled areas will disappear. Thus, the already disadvantaged in the labour market will face more difficult challenges as they are under-represented in the fastest growing occupations (information and service industries) and over-represented in the declining occupational categories. The same trends are already affecting Canada. Furthermore, as jobs become scarce, employers are demanding higher levels of education for many of the jobs traditionally filled by people with the least education. The demand for improved credentials is a screening device which excludes those older workers with either the experience in or the capacity to do this type of work.

Adult Basic Education (ABE) has been seen as a means to offer adults with low educational levels further opportunities to obtain the skills they did not previously acquire. The provision of that education has been regarded by adult educators as a fundamental human right. The underlying arguments are linked to the ideals of social equity and justice. While ABE may lead to improved employability and enhanced economic standing for many of those enrolled in its programs, arguments are also made for its role in developing the self-confidence, self-respect and enhanced interpersonal skills within its clients. These qualitative aspects are seen as valid indicators of 'success' by practitioners. ABE cannot be judged by the number of 'graduates', but rather by the people it has served.

The concern is, however, why so comparatively few people enter ABE programs, especially at the lower literacy (or Fundamental) levels. Studies and commentators on ABE have estimated that only one percent to six percent of the target population enrol in programs. (Calamai, 1987; Hautecoeur, 1989; Mezirow et al, 1975; Quigley, 1990.) If adult educators hope to reach this population, we need to know more about the reasons for non-participation in programs. A related problem for ABE practitioners is that of student attrition. Dropout rates have been quoted to be as high as 20 to 60 percent. Literacy learners often leave programs without giving any explanation, so organizers and instructors are left to wonder whether it is the program that is at fault or whether there were other extenuating circumstances.

The aim of this project was to investigate the reasons behind these two perceived problems - nonparticipation and attrition - in the hope that the findings might inform practice and suggest some new strategies to deal with these issues.

This report will: review the literature on these related topics; outline the procedures followed by the writer to obtain some answers to the problems in the British Columbian context; present the findings; and discuss the results.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature reviewed fell into three categories: (a) some of the general adult education literature related to the topics; (b) adult basic education survey literature which mentions participation and attrition in passing and; (c) adult basic education research studies specifically related to the topics.

PARTICIPATION

GENERAL ADULT EDUCATION STUDIES

Studies on participation in adult education have tended to focus either on motivational aspects and typologies of learners (Boshier, 1971; Boshier and Collins, 1985; Houle, 1961) or on the deterrents (or barriers) to participation (CAAE - ICEA, 1982; Confederation College, 1989; Cross, 1981; Darkenwald and Valentine, 1985).

Houle (1961) produced a parsimonious typology of adult learners: the goal-oriented; the learning-oriented; and, the activity-oriented. Those learners who were goal-oriented pursued education in order to accomplish a clear-cut objective. Those learners who were learning-oriented pursued knowledge for its own sake. Those learners who were activity-oriented pursued learning with no necessary connection to the stated purpose of the activity. A large-scale empirical test of Houle's typology by Boshier and Collins (1985) found that Houle's goal-oriented and learning-oriented categories were reasonably clear, but that the activity-oriented category was more complex. It was a forced aggregate of four clusters of motivations subsumed under the headings social stimulation, social contact, external expectations, and community service. An understanding of participation behaviour is related to the desire of adult education practitioners to tailor programs to the needs and interests of learners. The extension of findings from the general adult education field to the field of adult basic education, however, would ignore very important differences in population.

The theme of barriers or deterrents to participation is often discussed among adult basic education practitioners, but until recently, there have been few actual studies on this topic for the specific ABE population. Cross (1981) described barriers as being situational, dispositional and institutional. Scanlan and Darkenwald (1984) in their empirical study of deterrents to participation in health-related continuing professional education discovered Cross's classification to be over-simplified. Their results yielded six factors. Because they had dealt with a specialized population, their findings were not intended to be widely generalizable. A later study by Darkenwald and Valentine (1985) sought to build on this earlier work and to measure deterrents among the general adult population. Their analysis yielded six factors which they labelled as Lack of Confidence, Lack of Course Relevance, Time Constraints, Low Personal Priority, Cost, and Personal Problems. Only one of these factors - cost - was identical to those deterrents identified in the previous study with a specialized population. This research shows the multi-dimensions inherent in the deterrent constructs. The authors suggest that because of the different findings of the two studies, modified or specially developed Deterrents to Participation Scale (DPS) instruments are needed to measure deterrents for distinctive sub-populations.

In Canada, two research studies which have described barriers or deterrents to participation in adult education are the CAAE-ICEA study (1982) *From the Adult's Point of View and The Barriers Project* (1989). The former lists 15 types of barriers which recurred in discussions with groups of people known to experience difficulties when they seek to participate in learning opportunities offered through public institutions. *The Barriers Project* which focussed on the removal of barriers to part-time students, lists nine types of barriers identified by community colleges participating in the study.

GENERAL ADULT BASIC EDUCATION STUDIES

Studies such as those conducted by Hunter and Harman (1979), Mezirow et al (1975), and Thomas (1976, 1983) have all noted the low levels of participation in adult basic education programs in relation to the apparent statistical need. This phenomenon may be partially explained either by the lack of programs, or the lack of awareness, but there are many other contributing factors. Mezirow et al paint a graphic picture of a potential ABE student by asking the readers to put themselves in the student's shoes -

> You are a forty-five year old black man, eking out a living at an unstable succession of menial and arduous jobs, poor, haunted by failure, numbed with self-doubt, without study skills and unable to read. Furthermore, going back to school seems an endless uphill struggle. Just learning the three R's means years of weary plugging, night after night, month after month. And then what? What will an eighth grade education get you? Into the ninth grade is about all. So you resign yourself to still more long months and maybe win a high school diploma. What is the big payoff when you have finally made it? (p. 37)

In the same study, only 13 percent of the ABE Directors surveyed strongly agreed with the statement that "ABE has had substantial success in reaching the chronically unemployed or underemployed males commonly labelled 'hard-core'." ABE typically serves those that it is best able to serve - the already motivated and those most likely to succeed.

Hunter and Harman (1979) quote the work of the Appalachian Adult Education Center which identified four groups of people in need of adult basic education. Each group, however, had special needs and required different approaches and different services. This differentiation of needs and services within ABE is becoming a theme in the literature.

SPECIFIC ADULT BASIC EDUCATION STUDIES

Several writers have suggested or have developed typologies of low-literate adults (e.g. Beder and Valentine, 1990; Fingeret, 1983; Hayes and Darkenwald, 1988 as cited in Hayes, 1988; Hayes and Valentine, 1989; Martin, 1984, 1987). These studies are useful to practitioners in that they have implications for recruitment, program design and instructional strategies. Some writers (Sisco, 1983; Smyth, 1986) have used the learning projects work of Tough (1979) to show that adults with low levels of formal education do engage in self-planned learning projects. Quigley (1987, 1990) uses resistance theory to explain nonparticipation in ABE.

Deterrents to participation as perceived by participants

Hayes (1988) points out that most of the literature on low participation in adult basic education is based on untested assumptions or descriptive studies of groups such as high school dropouts. Using empirical research methods, she and Darkenwald (1988) confirmed the existence of numerous barriers to participation in ABE. Their sample was drawn from 160 ABE students in seven urban ABE programs in the U.S.A. These adults were asked to identify barriers that had prevented their participation prior to their enrollment in ABE.

Thus, the sample used could not permit a typology to be developed of the entire low-literate population, but is representative of those most likely to participate in ABE. Building on the work of Scanlan and Darkenwald (1984) and Darkenwald and Valentine (1985), Hayes and Darkenwald used the Deterrents to Participation Scale developed specifically for use with low-literate adults.

They found five factors to be the most conceptually meaningful representation of the data. These factors were:

1. Low Self-Confidence. Items subsumed under this factor reflected feelings of low self-esteem in general, and especially in relation to academic ability.
2. Social Disapproval. Items subsumed under this factor suggested the existence of a social environment, among family and friends, where education was not perceived to be important or useful.
3. Situational Barriers. Items under this factor were similar to those in Cross's (1981) situational barriers - cost, lack of transportation and family problems.
4. Negative Attitude to Classes. Items subsumed under this category were related to dislike of schoolwork or classes, or to an act of participation in classes such as going to a school building. The items evidently represented personal evaluations rather than barriers erected by the institutions.
5. Low Personal Priority. Under this category items reflected situations in which other activities took precedence over education.

The authors then went on to develop six types of low-literate adults clustered according to their scores on the five deterrent factors. Several socio-demographic variables were used to describe each cluster. The authors concluded that meaningful sub-groups of the low-literate population can be identified based on their perception of deterrents to participation in ABE, especially as scores on the deterrent factors highlighted differences between groups with similar background characteristics. There were two groups largely characterized by unemployed women with dependent children, for example, in which the one group scored high on Situational Barriers, followed by Low Self-Confidence and the other group scored high on Low Personal Priority - the lack of time was perceived as a major deterrent.

The implications for practice drawn from this study emphasize that low-literate adults should not be treated as a homogeneous group. Differentiated approaches to recruitment and program planning are required. The authors conclude that ABE "which has traditionally tried to serve the entire spectrum of individuals in the low-literate population, has met with limited success in reaching the most disadvantaged;" (p. 9). They then suggest that the most effective way to address barriers may be to tailor entire programs to the needs of specific groups. Community-based organizations that have made it a focus to serve such groups appear to reach a greater proportion of this population.

The importance of differentiation

Fitzgerald (1984), in her survey of 100 people housed in a mid-western slum area, found that 52 desired a community-based program and of these, 39 rejected a professional teacher in favour of community leadership. There were two free adult programs within walking distance of the area surveyed, yet 40 of the respondents said either that they would not register or that they did not need to register. As a community-based program was not available it was difficult to predict whether the adults would actually register if such did exist. Fitzgerald cites Kreitlow et al (1981) who found that "intention to participate does not translate into actual participation for the least educated and most in need" (Fitzgerald, p. 27). From the results of her own study, she then stresses that "ABE programs focus almost exclusively on educational needs whereas the hard-core illiterate's most pressing needs are primarily of an economic, social and psychological nature" (p. 27).

Fitzgerald (1984) challenged a finding in the Kreitlow (1981) study that high school noncompleters were functioning satisfactorily without a high school diploma. Martin (1987) pointed out that the contradictory findings could perhaps be explained by the differences in lifestyle classifications in the two samples. In his work (1984, 1987) he developed and further refined a typology of adult high school noncompleters. He did a qualitative study based on 79 two to three hour interviews over a fifteen month period. He drew his sample from three very different geographic/economic settings in the U.S.A.

His findings suggested six broad lifestyle classifications of noncompleters: Entrepreneurs, Superiors, Regulars, Suppliants, Marginals and Underclass. His classifications differentiated among noncompleters on the basis of both demographic characteristics and attitudinal dispositions. Essentially, the classifications were based on "means of financial support" and "social behaviour". Five of the groups demonstrated socially acceptable behaviour. The Entrepreneurs were owners of private businesses. The Superiors were managers of businesses or organizations. The Regulars were employed skilled and semi-skilled workers. The Suppliants received indirect means of financial support (e.g. from parents, spouse, siblings, unemployment compensation). The Marginals were recipients of public assistance. The Underclass shared means of financial support with three of the above groups but differed in that they exhibited a high level of anti-social behaviour (jail terms, prolonged substance abuse, etc.). Each category was described in terms of several demographic variables.

As a result of his findings he urged practitioners to focus resources on one or two lifestyle groups with similar characteristics rather than attempting to serve the entire range of the undereducated population. In this way situation-specific programs could be designed to meet similar learning needs. Consideration of typologies could also help eliminate contradictory and/or inconclusive research findings.

Hayes and Valentine (1989) in their study of the functional literacy needs of low-literate ABE students concluded that "the provision of functional literacy instruction is a complex task . . . It is essential to recognize differences in types of literacy needs and types of learners" (p. 10). They discovered that students learned most of what they needed least and least about what they needed most. A potential explanation for this finding was the mismatch between instructors' perceptions of the needs of the learners and the expressed needs of learners. The authors strongly urged continuous communication with learners.

Motivations to participate in ABE

Beder and Valentine (1990) explored the reasons of low-literate adults for participating in ABE. They used a random sample of 323 learners enrolled in ABE programs in the State of Iowa. Through factor analysis, they discovered ten factors provided a conceptually meaningful framework for the diversity of motivations leading to participation in ABE. These ten factors were:

1. Self-Improvement. The items in this category were abstract and global, rather than concrete and specific. The motivation was of an intrinsic or psychological nature perhaps best expressed by the phrase "What I hope to be", e.g. "I want to be more important."

2. Family Responsibilities. The items in this category related to practical aspects of family life: to be a better parent, to help children with their homework, to be a better spouse.

3. Diversion. This appeared to be the classic activity-oriented category (Houle, 1961; Boshier and Collins, 1985) which suggests that social contact and escapism play a part in participation in ABE.

4. Literacy Development. Items in this category dealt with written and oral communication skills. It is interesting to note that one item "I need to be better at math" did not fall into this category, suggesting that the motivation to learn mathematics is somewhat apart from the other motivations. This has implications for those in the field who usually place math skills with the literacy skills.

5. Community/Church Involvement. This category depicted ABE students as people who want to play more active roles in their religious and lay organizations and as citizens.

6. Job Advancement. The items here included wanting to do a job better, wanting promotion, wanting to get a better job. This grouping really only applied to those already employed - usually a minority in ABE programs.

7. Launching. Items in this category seemed to cluster around expectations of imminent life changes - marriage, parenthood - which would demand a restructuring of the respondents' lives. Further analysis also revealed respondents with high scores in this category to be young - at the point of moving from adolescence to adulthood. This appears to be a new factor which has emerged in the motivational literature and is the only factor directly related to life-cycle phenomena.

8. Economic Need. Items here related to finding a job, wanting to get off welfare, wanting to earn more money.

9. Educational Advancement. Items here related to high school completion and to the aspiration for higher education.

10. Urging of Others. This factor depicted motivation as a response to external pressures to attend ABE. It was the only overtly extrinsic factor.

(If the above ten factors are rearranged according to the highest mean item means obtained for each factor in this study, the ranking is as follows: Educational Advancement, Self-Improvement, Literacy Development, Community/Church Involvement, Economic Need, Family Responsibilities, Diversion and Job Advancement (tied in seventh place), Launching, and Urging of Others.)

The authors then identified six types of ABE students by subjecting the motivational factor scores to cluster analysis. The clusters were then described with respect to selected socio-demographic variables. The six types of ABE students which emerged from this study were: Mainstream Women, The Urged, Young Adults, The Climbers, Least Affluent and Least Employed, Low Ability Strivers.

This study reinforces the findings of others that motivation is multi-dimensional and that there are distinct subgroups of learners in the low-literate population. The motivational findings clearly show that there are many dimensions which go beyond the simple desire to improve basic skills, although Educational Advancement and Literacy Development emerged as high priorities. Five other factors, however, deal with the uses to which education will be put, rather than to education itself: Community/Church Involvement, Economic Need, Family Responsibilities, Job Advancement, and Launching. They impinge on the performance of adults in their social roles as family members, citizens and workers. The remaining factors relate to intrinsic motivation (Self-Improvement), to the social nature of classes (Diversion) and the role of external pressures in participation (Urging of Others).

The diversity of the motivations is captured by the identification of the distinct subgroups of learners. The findings again stress the importance of developing differentiated programming to match the needs and aspirations of the different groups of learners in order to enhance learner growth and program retention. The diversity of learners and motivations should also be considered by program planners and recruiters in developing messages to appeal to different kinds of potential learners.

The study of deterrents to participation in ABE programs and the study of motivational factors in participation are both important aspects for ABE practitioners to consider in trying to obtain a better understanding of the population to be served. Recently, however, another aspect has emerged - that of conscious avoidance of ABE or resistance.

Studies of nonparticipants

Quigley (1987, 1990) suggests that some nonparticipants may be aware of ABE programs and could participate, but have chosen to resist. Practitioners therefore need to know more about the resisters. In his study of fictional characters who resisted schooling, Quigley (1990) revealed three significant findings.

> First, resistance did not take place with the same degree of visibility in every case. Secondly, neither learning nor objective knowledge was ever resisted; these resisters were in fact highly capable learners who wanted to learn. Third, the process of resistance suggests stages of awareness and steps in behavior (p. 111).

Those who were the least visible in resisting were the most determined to quit. Those who were most visible in their resistance persisted longer in school, but somehow changed the schooling structure through their resistance. Quigley sees the resistance as being directed towards the values underlying the schooling enterprise rather than against learning per se. The resisters embraced and strengthened their belief in an alternative value system and lifestyle. Resistance was "a struggle to become free in the eyes, mind and heart of the resister" (p. 113). Quigley concludes that nonparticipants differ from participants in ABE and that programs designed for the participant minority cannot be assumed to be appropriate for the nonparticipant majority. He argues for more learner-grounded models in ABE and emphasizes that resisters are capable learners and courageous individuals who give their allegiance to a culture and to values they believe in.

Beder in his study of 129 nonparticipants in ABE in Iowa found that of 32 reasons for nonparticipation, five of the six most quoted reasons related to attitudes towards ABE or perceptions of ABE (Beder and Quigley, 1990). These reasons were:

> "I would feel strange going back to school."
> "There aren't many people in adult high school classes my age."
> "Going back to school would be like going to high school all over again."
> "I am too old to go back to school."
> "A high school diploma wouldn't improve my life."

The mean age for nonparticipants who responded to the study was 56-57 years and their mean income was $23,500.

Factor analysis in this study reduced the 32 reasons to four factors: Low Perception of Need, Perceived Effort, Dislike for School and Situational Barriers. There is an overlap of some of these factors with those discovered by Hayes and Darkenwald (1988) cited above. Low perception of need was found to correlate with age. As adults age, their perception of need declines. Perceived difficulty and dislike for school correlated poorly or not at all with socio-demographic variables suggesting that reasons for nonparticipation cut across the socio-demographic groups. Situational barriers correlated with marriage, number of children in the home and full-time employment.

These newer studies on nonparticipants in ABE indicate that in addition to motivational factors and barriers or deterrents to participation, practitioners should be cognizant of the group of people who could be called "avoiders" or "resisters". If people know about ABE programs and are indifferent to them or consciously avoid them, what should the response of the ABE field be? Should the right not to participate be included in the rights of the undereducated? Should the field induce participation through stimulating advertising or incentives? Should the field more clearly examine its program offerings and instructional strategies and try to make them more responsive to the population it aims to serve? The answers to these questions are crucial for trying to resolve problems of low participation.

PROGRAM ATTRITION

Program attrition has been a major concern of adult education practitioners and researchers for a considerable period of time. Despite several studies, however, there has been little progress in understanding the phenomenon of adult dropout. There are several reasons for this state of affairs: (a) the complexity of the phenomenon; (b) lack of consensus on how "dropout" should be defined; and (c) very few theory-based studies.

While program attrition affects most adult education programs, ABE has been plagued by high rates of absenteeism and student turnover. Mezirow et al (1975) found in their survey that one in five instructors "estimated absenteeism in the 10 to 24 percent range and nearly a quarter reported 25 to 49 percent of the students absent at any one class session." (p. 67). "Two-fifths of the teachers estimated that 10 to 24 percent of their students drop out by the sixth week of class. Another 17 percent placed the dropout rate in their classes during the first five weeks in the 25 to 49 percent range" (p. 68). The authors go on to say that these estimates are conservative as students continue to drop out after the initial weeks.

In Mezirow's survey, instructors were given five reasons for dropout and asked to rank them in importance. "Work schedule" was considered the most important reason by 58 percent of the respondents. "Discouragement over lack of progress" was considered the number one cause by 17 percent of the instructors. "Child care" was considered most important by 15 percent and "moving away" was ranked first by 10 percent. The fifth reason "fear for personal safety" was apparently not mentioned.

Thomas (1976) in her survey of a limited number of programs in Ontario, estimated dropout to be between 22 and 50 percent from data yielded at that time. She found that among instructors, "health reasons" topped the list of factors contributing to dropout. This was followed by employment-related reasons, academic achievement, and personal factors. Among program administrators, employment opportunities and academic achievements were seen as most important, followed by personal factors.

Recent researchers of ABE dropout have commented on the contradictory or inconclusive nature of much dropout research (Darkenwald and Gavin, 1987). Several researchers are attempting to build conceptual frameworks and have conducted theory-based studies of segments of the ABE population. (See for example, Darkenwald and Gavin, 1987; Garrison, 1985, 1987.) Diekhoff and Diekhoff (1984) identified five variables that were related to dropout. Bosma (1988) conducted a study on attrition and persistence with a large sample of adults in a mid-western urban centre over a two year period and confirmed some previous findings.

One of the best known conceptualizations of adult dropout is the "congruence" model developed by Boshier (1973). He suggested that congruence both within the participant and between the participant and his education environment determines dropout/persistence (p. 256). If a learner's inner state of harmony is disturbed (i.e. incongruities develop which result in anxiety), dropout is likely to occur. Boshier measured self/ideal self, self/instructor, and self/other students incongruities and used the scores to predict dropout. In analyzing the variables with persisters and dropouts he found that dropouts showed greater incongruities in self/ideal self and self/others incongruence.

Self/instructor and self/other students are dimensions of the classroom environment. In Boshier's work, however, they were reduced to self/other incongruence and thus conceptualized as a psychological variable. In a critique of the work, Garrison (1987) points out that the model was further reduced to one psychological construct namely, self-esteem. The model has thus been criticized for its psychological reductionism. Its generalizability has also been questioned because it was based on a study using a sample of university continuing education students. Garrison (1985, 1987) has argued for using a more holistic psychosocial perspective in dropout studies and for limiting generalizations to situation-specific populations.

In his 1985 study, Garrison discovered that dropouts thought their courses were more relevant and were more certain of their goals than persisters. This apparently anomalous finding was subjected to further analysis which revealed that "scholastic ability and course relevancy interaction added to the discrimination of persisters and dropouts more than course relevancy itself" (p. 36). Also, a self-confidence and ideal/self discrepancy variable was shown to be a good discriminator of persistence and dropout. These findings were interpreted as showing that ABE learners "with lower scholastic ability, lower self-confidence, and greater socioeconomic change may set unrealistic goals for themselves and have unrealistic expectations of the program" (p. 36). Thus, incongruities appear resulting in dropout. These findings have implications for counselling potential learners.

In a later study, Garrison (1987) sought to test Boshier's congruence model with 110 learners in a high school completion program (Grade 10 math classes). He found that dropouts in this group had less self/other incongruence than persisters. This was the reverse of one of Boshier's findings. Garrison uses this anomalous finding to stress the need for limiting generalization to specific populations. In this study, Garrison was able to correctly predict 93 percent of the persisters, but only 20.8 percent of the dropouts, leading him to conclude that "reasons for dropout are many and complex, thus making prediction of dropout very difficult," (p. 219).

Darkenwald and Gavin (1987) used social environment theory "to determine the relation of dropout behavior to the social ecology of the classroom" (p. 152). Their sample consisted of 77 adults enrolled in GED preparation classes. They found a significant difference between persisters and dropouts in the item of Affiliation. Dropouts expected a classroom environment characterized by less social involvement with other students. The authors remark that this finding has more implications for research and theory-building than for practice! It has been established that the goal of obtaining a GED is a great motivator in adult basic education (Bosma, 1988; Diekhoff and Diekhoff, 1984; Valentine and Darkenwald, 1986). Adults in a GED preparation class are likely highly motivated and goal-oriented. One explanation of the Darkenwald and Gavin finding could be that the social atmosphere detracts from the work-orientation and purposefulness of some adults in this group.

Diekhoff and Diekhoff (1984) discovered in their analysis of 66 students enrolled in literacy training that dropouts tended to be (a) young, (b) Hispanic, (c) not seeking GED certification, (d) unemployed but available for work, and (e) from illiterate families. Using these variables, the authors were able to successfully assign 82 percent (36 out of 44) of the students to a "persister" or "dropout" group. An attempt to cross-validate the study the following year with a new sample of 48 students was not successful. However, the authors explained this discrepancy by indicating that program procedures had been altered between the two program years. In an attempt to reduce the attrition rate of 53 percent in the first year, new intake and screening procedures were introduced. These included a student waiting-period of up to one month before being assigned a tutor after the initial interview. This procedure became a self-screening device, so that students most likely to drop out did so, in effect, before actually entering the program. This dropout group evidently closely matched the dropout profile in the original sample. The program's attrition rate was considerably lower the second year.

Bosma (1988) conducted a large scale study with a sample of some 1400 ABE literacy students over a two year period in Minneapolis. He was concerned with the characteristics of dropouts and persisters. Within the attrition category he was concerned with the differences between nonparticipants and dropouts. Within the persistence category he was concerned with the differences between those who were still active in the program and completers. The study was shaped by the State of Minnesota's ABE reporting guidelines. Thus, "a nonparticipant" was someone who had less than 12 hours attendance at the program site. "A dropout" was someone who had dropped out after 12 hours of attendance in the program. An "active" learner was someone who had completed one module in the program and was still in the program. A "completer" was someone who had either advanced to another program, passed the GED, completed all his/her learning goals as specified on entry, or had completed one learning goal as specified on entry.

Bosma identified 36 independent variables in six categories for his study. He found that 17 variables were significant but only accounted for 6.5 percent of variance in attrition/persistence. He thus concluded that reasons for attrition are "unknown" and that 36 variables lacked the power to predict attrition and persistence. In trying to explain his results, he indicated that his sample consisted of a diverse, heterogeneous population which may have accounted for lack of relationships in the variables. He also indicated it was a large-scale study whereas results from other studies (e.g. Diekhoff and Diekhoff, 1984) used much smaller sample sizes. Another difficulty may have been the definitional categories imposed on the study as a result of the state's recordkeeping requirements. The 12 hours of attendance to distinguish between nonparticipants and dropouts, for example, appears rather arbitrary. For other researchers and practitioners 12 hours would be considered indicative of participation!

In his analyses between the groups within each major category of attrition/persistence, he did confirm Diekhoff and Diekhoff's (1984) finding that dropouts were looking for work and dropped out if a job was obtained. He also confirmed that obtaining a GED correlated positively with persistence (i.e. completion of program).

Because of his findings, Bosma concluded that:

> quantitatively oriented criteria presently used to assess attrition and persistence at ABE education sites is unrealistic and at best, very limited in scope, particularly when one considers the nature of the population being served.(p. 85)

He followed this conclusion with a plea for more attention to the largely ignored qualitative effects on people's lives such as increases in self-esteem, persistence in coming to a program at all and a diminution of the practices of labelling and typecasting students engaged in ABE learning situations. He also stressed that more effort should go into exploring ways to attract the vast majority of the target population.

The work of Charnley and Jones (1979) in Britain provided the ABE literacy field with five groupings of achievements upon which success could be judged. The groupings were: affective personal achievements; affective social achievements; socio-economic achievements; cognitive achievements; and, enactive achievements. Evaluating ABE literacy students according to these criteria could affect notions of attrition.

SUMMARY

Most of the literature reviewed is U.S. based: little or no comparable research on ABE participation and ABE attrition has been undertaken in Canada. The literature has been survey-oriented in the past, but in the 1980s several researchers have conducted theory-based and empirical studies in attempts to provide firmer theoretical foundations or conceptual frameworks for examination of ABE phenomena. The complex nature of the target population, however, presents many difficulties to researchers as some of the results of reviewed studies have shown.

What has emerged from the literature review is a strong emphasis on the heterogeneity of the target population. Undereducated adults cannot be viewed as a homogeneous population simply requiring 'more education'. A variety of psychological and socio-demographic variables interact with the learning setting to produce many different effects. The various typologies that have been developed of low-literate adults confirm the heterogeneity of the target population. The implications for practice are to consider differentiated recruitment efforts and program design in order to serve the target population more effectively.

Much of the literature in the U.S. has been directed at adult high school non-completers or those involved in GED programs. The average grade level attained by most of the population samples appears to be around the ninth grade level. There is an emphasis also on traditional ABE, that is, classroom-based instruction within institutions. The race variable is also evident in U.S. ABE research studies: Black, White and Hispanic factors are often considered and sometimes figure in results.

The contradictory nature and inconclusiveness of the findings of many of the studies call for replication efforts in other ABE circumstances and with different samples. Such replication is called for by the researchers themselves. ABE research is still in its infancy. Much more needs to be done, not only in replicating existing ABE studies and experimenting with new conceptual frameworks for ABE, but also in coming to consensus on such crucial terms as "dropout" and "persister". If every researcher defines these terms differently, useful comparisons will always be difficult to make.

Qualitative aspects and effects in ABE literacy programs cannot be ignored. The studies of self-planned learning projects among low-literate adults and preliminary work on resisters of ABE show that many adults are capable and willing to learn - but not in a traditional educational setting. Many researchers see the community-based approach as one answer for a certain segment of the target population. Whatever the approach, adult educators must recognize the social background and specific learning needs of low-literate adults. In the words of Fingeret (1983), "if we do not learn to work with them, many illiterate adults will continue to refuse to work with us" (p. 144).

III. THE PRESENT STUDY - PROCEDURES

This project was an exploratory study on the issues of nonparticipation and program attrition in ABE literacy programs in the province of British Columbia. The lack of substantive research on the issues in the province and the short time-frame allotted to the project influenced the project design. The project was very much survey and action-research oriented.

The suggested plan of activity for each of the two issues was to conduct a literature search on each topic and then to work with literacy learners and practitioners to: (a) identify reasons for nonparticipation and for dropout, and (b) suggest strategies to overcome the problems. The effective working time for the project was four months.

The activities included:

1. undertaking literature searches on the identified topics;
2. reading past reports of learner conferences and events in B.C.and elsewhere;
3. talking with the staff of the Adult Literacy Contact Centre in Vancouver about their experiences with learner or potential learner telephone calls and their follow-up;
4. compiling a cover letter and general questionnaire for circulation among the provincial college ABE Administrators, and the college ABE Fundamental (literacy) Instructors (see Appendix A);
5. arranging telephone and personal interviews with a variety of practitioners and agency people;
6. visiting seven local literacy classes to talk to the learners about their experiences and ideas;
7. interviewing specific individuals of low educational attainment, or low literacy skills who were either nonparticipants or withdrawals from ABE programs;
8. undertaking a telephone survey of nonregistrants in one college's ABE literacy programs; and
9. undertaking a telephone survey of withdrawals from a mid-sized suburban school district literacy program.

FINDING THE PERSONAL INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Choosing the locales

The activities were to be provincial in scope, and there were definite expectations that nonparticipants and withdrawals would be interviewed, as a budget item for learner honoraria at the rate of $20 an hour had been included in the project. It was clearly impossible in the time allotted to cover all regions of the province, thus, selections had to be made. A review of the research literature had shown that factors such as geographic location and the socio-economic composition of the surveyed community influenced results. Compare, for example, Fitzgerald (1984) and Martin (1987), and Beder and Quigley (1990).

Several factors influenced the choice of locations in British Columbia. Personal contacts and networks were important to gain entry to classes and to the target population. As the writer lives in Victoria, various programs were contacted in the Greater Victoria Regional District first. While the visits to these programs were useful in themselves, they also served a field-test function. A new literacy program in the Malaspina College region was included because of the way they had obtained their students. During the public consultations of the Provincial Literacy Advisory Committee in October 1989, a number of written submissions emphasized the great need for literacy training in the downtown eastside of Vancouver. This is primarily a low-income, transient male neighbourhood, and was considered to be a good site for interviews.

It was also decided to include one northern location and one southern interior location. As the travel had to be done in winter, college regions having a cluster of easily accessible campus sites that were also close to airports were chosen. The other selection criterion was that the sites were currently engaged in ABE literacy activities or had had such activities in the past. This focus was required because of the need to interview nonparticipants and withdrawals. The emphasis in the directive of the nonparticipation part of the project was on barriers or deterrents to participation. Obviously, if programs do not exist, or have not existed, the notions of "barriers" to participation and "withdrawal" are academic. The problem becomes one of access and delivery. The college regions chosen were Northwest College (the communities visited were Prince Rupert, Terrace and Kitimat) and Selkirk College (the communities visited were Castlegar, Nelson, Crescent Valley and Trail).

The areas sampled then were: (a) Southern Vancouver Island - mainly service industry centres with emphasis on the hospitality industry; (b) Vancouver's downtown eastside - densely populated urban neighbourhood of low socio-economic level; (c) Northwest College - northern resource industry towns; and (d) Selkirk College - southern interior rural service industry and one-industry towns.

Finding the population

The crucial problem in nonparticipation ABE studies is how to identify a representative sample of nonparticipants. There was insufficient time to set up a study based on large-scale sampling. A suggested procedure was to visit literacy classes, talk to learners and ask them if they knew someone who had difficulties with reading and writing, who had never been to an ABE literacy program, and who would be willing to talk to the writer. This procedure did not produce many interviewees when it was tried in Victoria. Coordinators, instructors, rehab officers, and agency people were then contacted and asked to identify people. The coordinator at one college put an advertisement in two local weekly newspapers for two consecutive weeks (see Appendix B) for people to be interviewed. Two people came forward as a result of that. A Native Friendship Centre put a notice up in its building, and two people came forward through that channel. By and large, the sample was made up of people identified by some person other than the writer, but everyone had expressed a willingness to be interviewed for the project.

The sample population was to be drawn from adults 18 years and over with either less than a Grade 9 education or specific literacy problems. In fact, many income assistance people who were identified and who volunteered for the interview had higher levels of education. There were nonparticipants and withdrawals. In the end, there were more of the latter category. Some adults who had either just entered a literacy program or who were thinking about doing so were interviewed on the grounds that this sample would be most newly aware of the issues and problems faced in enrolling in a program. (Compare Hayes' 1988 study.)

The end result was that 66 people were interviewed on a face-to-face basis by the writer. The interviews on the average lasted about 45 minutes with the range being from half an hour to one and a half hours. A semi-structured open-ended interview format was used. Two interview schedules had been developed, one for each topic (see Appendix C), but in the trial runs the questions had seemed artificial and intrusive and there was some negative reaction from participants. The writer found that if the project was explained and she concentrated on establishing rapport, people opened up and in the course of their conversation many of the questions were answered without any further prompting. Everyone was assured of confidentiality and those for whom specific appointments had been made, received a small honorarium as indicated above. For students currently in class, no payment was offered. The interviews took place in a variety of settings -- people's homes, adult learning centres, college classrooms, motel restaurants, coffee-shops, a Native Friendship Centre, and a library.

THE INTERVIEW SAMPLE

The number of people actually interviewed was 66. However, five of these people, all women, appeared not to fit the sample requirements, although they had been referred for an interview. Four of the five people were on income assistance, and one was on workers' compensation. They all had either Grade 11 or Grade 12 education and had taken courses at other institutions since leaving school. None of them indicated that they had any literacy problems. However, their current life circumstances did provide some insights into the difficulties faced by single women and their attitudes towards education in general. They thus provided a small reference group with which to compare the responses from the women with literacy problems.

It is also important to note that some people did not appear for their interviews. In one setting, two people did not show up. The fee payment had not been mentioned to them. Whether they would have appeared if they had known about this, is not known. In another setting, three people who were on the interview list were not interviewed. (These three persons were all living in a low-income housing unit for women). There was no answer at two doors and the third one said, "I'm not interested." Three coordinators of other programs thought they could get one or two nonparticipants to talk to the writer. In the one case, the coordinator felt the person was so embarrassed and reluctant that she did not pursue the issue. In other cases, one or two people showed up while the writer was interviewing someone else and they did not wait around. There was also one no-show in the withdrawal category. However, two interviewees were unexpectedly added to the list. One person, together with his wife and son, made a pre-Christmas visit to the home of his friend while he was being interviewed. The visitors thus became involved in the process. The other person was in a coffee-shop where his friend was waiting for an interview and he volunteered himself for later in the day.

The number of people included in the sample for analysis was 61. Table 4 shows a breakdown of the sample by sex and level of education. The latter refers to the last completed grade at school, and does not take into account any educational improvements through attendance in ABE programs.

From this sample, it can be seen that the mean grade level for the males is lower than for the females. Grade levels were particularly low in the older male nonparticipant group. The group mean as a whole is higher than the mean level of education for the male withdrawal group, because of the presence of two younger men who have modified Grade 12 certificates but actually have very low literacy skills.

In the female sample the mean grade level was particularly low in the female withdrawal group. This group included members of the older generation of Doukhobors: some had never been to school, while others had had only limited schooling. The younger members in this cohort were women who had left school prematurely because of pregnancy.

Of the 61 persons in the total sample, eight of the men and four of the women were Natives. Two of the sample, one man and one woman, were from ESL/immigrant backgrounds, but both had lived in Canada for a long time. Everyone else was either born in Canada or was an Anglophone.

As Table 5 shows, most of the sample were in the 18 to 60 years age bracket. There was one young adult - a 17 year old male. Nobody was over 60 years of age.

Definitions

The terms *nonparticipants* (NPs), *withdrawals* (WDs) and *participants* (Ps) should be defined. The *nonparticipants* are people who have never enrolled in an ABE program in their lives. They may have been involved in some other kind of learning project or short course, but they have never gone to an ABE or literacy program. The *withdrawals* are people who at some time in their lives attended an

ABE program or several ABE programs. Nine males in this group and three females had just enrolled in or were about to participate in an institutional ABE or community-based literacy program. As they had a history of withdrawals they were classified in this group rather than in the participant group. The *participants* were people who had never before enrolled in any kind of ABE program, but had just started. Their memories of the experience leading up to becoming a participant were thus quite fresh in their minds.

THE TELEPHONE SURVEYS

College nonregistrants

Camosun College's ABE Department suggested a strategy for identifying a segment of the nonparticipant population -- those adults who had come to the college to be assessed, but who had not followed through by registering in college ABE programs. A similar kind of survey had been undertaken by the College's Assessment Centre in the fall of 1988. At that time, the sample was drawn from those adults who wrote an English Placement Test or a Camosun College Mathematics Test between June 1, 1988 and August 31, 1988, and placed in ABE Introductory (upper Fundamental level) or ABE Intermediate level courses, but had not registered in ABE courses at the College by October 14, 1988.

For the present project the sample population consisted of those adults who had written the English Placement Test at the College between September 1, 1988 and August 31, 1989 and placed in Basic Academic Skills Development (BASD) (lower Fundamental level) or ABE Introductory level (English), but had not registered in courses at the college by January 15, 1990. This work was done by a research assistant familiar with the College Assessment Centre and its computer systems. The assistant then undertook the telephone survey for this writer. An interview schedule was designed (see Appendix D) and the assistant was given an orientation session before embarking on the telephone survey. The total number of people on the list was 90.

TABLE 4. Personal Interviews Sample and Level of Education

	Males				Females			
Group	Less Than Gr. 9	Gr. 9-12	Sub-total No.	Mean Grade	Less Than Gr. 9	Gr. 9-12	Sub-total No.	Mean Grade
Nonparticipants	6	4	10	7.4	1	7	8	10.3
Withdrawals	14	5	19	6.7	9	6	15	6.7
Participants	1	2	3	10.0	4	2	6	7.7
Totals/Mean	21	11	32	7.2	14	15	29	8.1

Note: Overall mean grade was 7.6 for the 61 interviewees.

TABLE 5. Interview Sample by Age Group and Sex

	Males			Females		
Age Group	NPs	WDs	Ps	NPs	WDs	Ps
< 18 years	-	1	-	-	-	-
18-29	2	7	-	4	5	5
30-44	4	7	3	2	3	1
45-60	4	4	-	2	7	-
> 60 years	-	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotals	10	19	3	8	15	6

N = 61

School district withdrawals

The Adult Literacy Program of Surrey at the Invergarry Learning Centre provided the writer with a list of names and telephone numbers of people whom they considered had "dropped out" in the fall term (September to December 1989), without giving any reason. There were 28 names from the day classes and 26 names from the evening classes for a total of 54. The writer undertook this telephone survey herself, using the first 12 questions of the Interview Guide for Withdrawals (Appendix C).

One-to-one tutoring withdrawal

The Learners' Network, a program of Project Literacy Victoria was approached to see whether the writer could interview persons who had withdrawn from one-to-one tutoring. As this is a community-based program which stresses confidentiality, the program staff felt that they should make the first contact to explain the request and to see whether the person would be willing to be interviewed. The secretary tried to contact eight people who had withdrawn from the program in the last year (1989), but found that telephone numbers were not in service or the people had moved, so there were no interviewees from this program.

The results from the various activities will be reported separately.

IV. FINDINGS - PARTICIPATION ASPECTS

The sources for information relating to this topic were: (a) the Adult Literacy Contact Centre's calls from learners; (b) the reactions of college ABE Administrators and literacy instructors to the questionnaires which were distributed; (c) group discussions and individual interviews with participants in literacy classes; (d) personal interviews of nonparticipants; and (e) telephone survey of ABE literacy nonregistrants.

THE ADULT LITERACY CONTACT CENTRE

The Adult Literacy Contact Centre (ALCC) is an information and referral service which was established as a project of the Adult Basic Education Association of British Columbia (ABEABC) to serve provincial literacy needs. Since the spring of 1989, the Centre has had a toll-free number for long-distance callers in the province. The Centre's Newsletter from time to time publishes the breakdown of the calls it has received that month. The writer approached the Centre's Director and staff to see whether it would be possible to get a more comprehensive breakdown of the kinds of calls with respect to the difficulties experienced by learners or potential learners in participating in ABE literacy classes. The report compiled by the Centre's staff is found in Appendix E. It provides a cross-section which seems typical of the field as a whole. The quotes were selected by the information worker to illustrate a variety of circumstances and concerns.

THE ADMINISTRATORS' AND INSTRUCTORS' QUESTIONNAIRES

The Administrators' letter and questionnaire were designed at the beginning of the project as a lead-in to the topics and as a means of identifying possible people and places for visits. Only nine responses were received from the fifteen college ABE Administrators. Two months later a second opportunity arose to sound out the ABE professionals at a provincial ABE Fundamental Level Articulation Committee Meeting of college instructors. As the project was then underway, the basic questionnaire used for the Administrators was modified to obtain some additional information. Nine responses were also received from the ABE instructors (see Appendix A for copies of cover letters and the questionnaires.)

Reasons for non-participation

In answer to the question, "What do you think are some of the reasons for non-participation of adults with low literacy skills in literacy programs?" Administrators collectively generated many responses which have been grouped under several headings in Table 6. Instructors also collectively generated a list which is presented in Table 7. There are some interesting similarities and differences in the two tables. The headings and groupings are the writer's, but responses seemed to fit into nine headings in each set of answers. Eight of them are essentially the same.

It is interesting that none of the instructors mentioned "special needs", but one administrator did. The instructors included perceived difficulties at the classroom level, which might have been expected. Instructors were much stronger on the "lack of support systems" than the administrators. There is also a touch of cynicism in the responses under "institutional constraints". The high number of people (7 out of 18) mentioning "institutional intimidation" is rather revealing. This could imply the need for alternative delivery modes, or more sensitive orientation and counselling before students enroll at institutions. The four responses indicating lack of programs could be interpreted as substantiating the first alternative.

The report submitted from the Adult Literacy Contact Centre (Appendix E) also dovetails with many of the responses from the ABE professionals.

Barriers

The "Barriers to participation in adult education" list in the instructors' questionnaire (Appendix A p. 108) was drawn from the report *From The Adult's Point of View* (CAAE, ICEA, 1982). As stated, it is not literacy-specific. Instructors were asked to priorize the barriers which they perceived to be the greatest for potential learners in their college region. The priorized list is given in Table 8.

TABLE 6. ABE Administrators' Perceived Reasons for Nonparticipation

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Economic Reasons:
* - lack of financial assistance (2X);
- direct costs (fees);
- indirect costs (books, supplies, transportation, daycare, lost income.

Personal and cultural constraints:
* - work (3X);
* - children (2X).
- cultural constraints (2X) eg. opposition of husband to wife enrolling;
- personal problems;
- alcoholism;
- family constraints other than financial.

Special needs:
- handicapping conditions (physical, psychological, emotional, and learning problems).

Anxiety and embarrassment:
* - low self-esteem (3X);
- having to admit they have a literacy problem;
- fear of returning to school (too old; away too long; won't fit in);
- fear of being so far behind they won't catch up;
- fear of low skill level being discovered;
- fear of teasing;
- fear of failure.

Past school experiences:
- previous negative educational experiences;
- misconceptions about ABE programs - think it's like school;
- expect large classes;
- instruction similar to the past.

Low perceived need:
- don't perceive the problem as such;
- have managed to cope, so why enroll?

Institutional constraints:
* - institutional intimidation (3X);
* - lack of commitment of college administration and staff (2X);
- large classes.

Poor awareness/support:
* - lack of awareness of programs (3X);
- don't know who to ask for help.

Structural:
* - lack of programs (2X);
- geographic barriers - isolation and transportation.

Note: Asterisked items were mentioned more than once, as indicated in parentheses.

TABLE 7. ABE Instructors' Perceived Reasons for Nonparticipation

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Economic Reasons:

* - finances - learners need to live as well as pay for tuition and supplies (3X);
* - fees (2X);
- loss of unemployment benefits (UIC) if return.

Personal and cultural constraints:

- time factor;
- pride;
- family opposition (cultural);
- family commitments;
- overprotective parents.

Anxiety and embarrassment:

* - fear (2X);
- low self-esteem;
- self-consciousness and embarrassment;
- lack of confidence;
- big risk to reveal ignorance at initial interview;
- fear of labelling at assessment time;
- easier to stay away.

Past school experiences:

* - failure to see use of schooling in light of past negative experiences (3X);
* - easier to compensate for low literacy skills rather than to correct them (2X).

Low perceived need and distractions:

- other things seem more important;
- outside influences compete more successfully for time.

Institutional constraints:

* - intimidation by educational institutions (4X);
- unconscious, insidious stance of educators to be "controllers" of the game;
- scheduling not conducive to attendance.

Instructional strategies:

- classroom activity distracting;
- difficulty in working in a group.

Lack of support systems:

* - lack of transportation (3X);
* - lack of daycare (3X);
* - lack of counselling (2X);
* - lack of awareness of programs (2X).

Structural:

* - lack of appropriate programs (2X).

Note: Asterisked were mentioned more than once, as indicated in parentheses.

TABLE 8. Barriers to Participation as Priorized by ABE Instructors

Rank	Listed Barrier	List No.
1	Financial	1
1	Lack of support systems	3
3	Lack of information (awareness)	4
4	Geographic barriers	5
4	Attitudinal barriers	9
6	Insensitivity of front-line workers	"other"[a]
7	Lack of agency coordination	2
8	Learner fatigue	7
9	Fees and other costs [b]	10
10	Lack of time	8
10	Scheduling	11
12	Pressure to complete [c]	"other"
13	Institutional practices	6
14	Curriculum inappropriate	12
15	Family opposition	"other"

[a] Item numbers 13, 14, 15 on the circulated list were not applicable. Suggested others ranked higher than these.

[b] If the "Fees and other costs" item is combined with the "Financial" item which relates to more overall resources, then "Finances and costs" would have the highest rank.

[c] The "Pressure to complete" item was interpreted as belonging to sponsorship requirements rather than classroom requirements.

The importance of the financial item was stressed by at least two instructors who said that if this item were sufficiently addressed, many other listed barriers would disappear.

Comments

The findings from the questionnaires in this project on the reasons for non-participation give a richer and more relevant framework for the low-literate adult population than the use of the general barriers to participation in the adult list.

Thus, this exercise confirms findings cited in the literature review: Measures and classifications generated for the general adult education population cannot be successfully transferred to specific adult populations.

Compensation for illiteracy

The answers to this question from administrators and instructors have been collapsed together in Table 9.

TABLE 9. Ways in Which Low-literate Adults Compensate as Perceived by ABE Administrators and Instructors

Strategy	Score
Reliance on others	14
Avoidance of situations where skills required	11
Fake and manipulate situations	6
Rationalization - don't admit to problem	4
Stay in own familiar social circle	4
Use defensive behaviour	4
Use TV and radio to obtain information	3
Use telephone to greater extent	2
Develop memories and organizational skills	3
Become excellent in other areas	3
Develop anti-social, hostile behaviour	2
Become "street-smart"	1
Use non-print clues for identification eg. pictures and smell to identify products	1
They don't compensate	1

Note: Score means the number of times strategy was mentioned.

This table needs little comment. The list might be used as a reference to compare with the findings of the personal interviews which follow.

THE PARTICIPANTS

Visits were made to seven literacy classes to make contact with current participants. Five of the classes were community college-based and two of the classes were other community-based. Four of the classes were part of Camosun College's programming and one was part of Malaspina College. Three of the Camosun College classes came under the Basic Academic Skills Development Program (BASD) which takes in people at the lower Fundamental ABE level. These classes were scheduled at different times, one was an early morning class, one was late morning-early afternoon, and the third was an evening class. Each class had a different instructor, but all were held in the same room on the main campus. The fourth class was a pilot program, co-sponsored between the College's Community Education Services and the Saanich Indian School Board. It was held on the reserve about 20 kilometres outside of Victoria in the Saanich peninsula. The program is funded through the Canadian Job Strategy.

The Malaspina College program was also a pilot program and was offered in a downtown building separate from the other college programs. The population in this program had been characterized as "hard-core welfare recipients". The two pilot programs had a longer day than the other classes and offered life skills as well as literacy or academic skills training. The other three college classes concentrated on the literacy and math skills.

The other two programs visited were a class at READ, a community-based non-profit program, and the Adult Learning Centre of the Sooke School District (School District 62). Group discussions were held at all sites except Sooke where the interviews were one-on-one. Some students from other classes or programs in the province also volunteered for one-on-one interviews for a total of nine participants as defined for this study. Three were male and six were female.

CLASS DISCUSSIONS

The focus of the discussions was oriented to how the participants came to be in class; what made it easy; what made it difficult; and the suggestions they had for increasing participation in programs.

Recruitment

In the two pilot programs the participants had been recruited by workers - a rehab worker in the case of the Malaspina program and a Native community worker in the case of the Saanich program. In the evening class, most of the participants were working and fee-payers. They indicated that they knew the college existed and offered upgrading. In the other classes, by far the majority were referred by agency workers and other "feeder" programs. Some people said they knew the programs existed through their friends, but most did not know about the programs until a worker mentioned it. Nearly everyone agreed that more advertising was required.

Fears and anxieties

Their fears and anxieties about coming revolved around their feelings that: they might be the only one with a real problem; they might be too old; they would have to sit at desks like in school; learning might be painful; and, they might not "make it" again. One of the classes was situated on a second storey of the building and when asked to go back to the first day of the program and to remember what it felt like, nearly all the participants said "scared". One said he missed the class. Another said he stopped half-way up the stairs and asked himself what he was doing. They were afraid of themselves, of failure and of school. Many of the participants in other classes said that other people - friends and family did not know they were coming to literacy classes. They said either that they were going to college, or that they were "upgrading" their education.

Reasons for participation

One woman said she was tired of hiding her problem (illiteracy) and having it "eat away" at her. One person said, "It's like being in prison for years - the prison of oneself." Some of the day class participants at Camosun had come from other community-based literacy programs which, they said, were very useful in giving them hope and a belief in themselves - the belief that they were teachable, and could learn. Many of the evening class were there to try to improve their job prospects. Some wanted to enter apprenticeship programs and did not have the required academic entry requirements. Some of the men in other classes had had their own businesses, but they had failed, so they were trying to improve their skills to find another job or be more successful next time round. One of the men did not want to be in school. He had had a business, but an accident prevented his continuing in that line of work. He had been told to take a course in small business and for that he needed to improve his literacy skills. In the Native program some of the women said their marriages had broken up and they needed to upgrade so they could work and not be on social assistance.

Experience in class

Nearly everyone agreed that once they were in class it was not as bad as they feared. They liked the setting; they liked working at their own pace; and they liked their instructors. The two groups that had life-skills were really fulsome in their praise of this component. The Malaspina group said that they could all see the difference in each other compared with when they began the program. Then, many were scared and withdrawn, but gradually, through trust and respect of each other, their confidence and self-esteem were enhanced. As they learned more about themselves and individual differences in learning styles and needs, they became more relaxed with each other and began to open up and help each other. They were strong advocates of Life Skills and very appreciative of their sensitive coach and instructor. The Life Skills in the Native program focussed on identity and culture. The participants were drawn from four bands with a strong sense of community and culture. Saanich means "Emerging People". The class had chosen a name for itself, "The beginning of the Emerging People".

Participation difficulties

The difficulties in participating perceived by these groups revolved around a variety of issues. The evening working group acknowledged that one had to be extremely motivated and dedicated to come to class from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. four nights a week after having done a full day's work. Many of them came directly from work and grabbed a bite on the run or missed eating in order to get to class on time. Many individuals would not have the stamina or perseverance required to maintain that schedule, or families might not encourage such committed activity. One homemaker from "a high-income bracket" observed that the reason most people do not come is the cost. Her husband was able to afford to pay for her tuition and books, but she felt that this was not the case for everyone. (Out of 31 participants in two of the day classes in the fall of 1989, twelve were actually fee-payers. Ten had their tuition paid through MSSH, six through ABESAP and the remaining three from three other agencies.)

Systemic problems

The bureaucracy and the school system received some hard knocks. One person said, "You have to be a con artist to work the system." Others acknowledged that agency workers were often insensitive and put students under unnecessary pressure. Many felt that they were being pushed ahead too fast, because of the emphasis on employability. "Why, if we're working, and making progress, do we have to go through a hassle each time to be re-sponsored, when the time has run out?", queried one woman. Some of the older women wondered what was going wrong with the school system "that so many young people are in class?" The answer to that was given by one or two Grade 12 graduates who said they had been pushed through the system without being given the individual attention they needed.

Transportation and day-care

In the Victoria classes, questions of transportation did not arise. The campus is accessible by several different buses. In the Native program, however, one reason for its location was that transportation had been a problem for Native women wanting to enroll in BASD or ABE at the city campuses. Day-care was an issue as well. In the Malaspina program which drew on a fairly wide rural area, transportation and daycare were also issues for some of the participants. A participant in the READ program had to do extra travelling each day in order to drop off and pick up her child at a day care facility.

Next steps

The questions of where they were going and what they were going to do next came in for some discussion. A reiterated theme was to tie the literacy training to some kind of job skill training without high academic prerequisites. Another theme was the need for transitions or bridges between different programs and for adequate counselling and support throughout. Many felt that buddy-systems, mentoring, or peer help could all be used to advantage, if they could be recognized and established.

Many of the above items were also discussed in the one-on-one interviews with participants.

INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

There were more female participants than males in the interview sample and they had a lower mean level of education and were younger than the males.

All three men were married with children. Two of them said they were dyslexic. Two were employed and the third was receiving Workers' Compensation. The latter could have accepted a job at $5.00 an hour, but that was not enough to support his family. And, as the job required filling out orders and totalling the till, he decided to take the literacy course and retrain as much as possible. Two of the men found that the use of computers helped them to learn and to express themselves. The third man was making progress by having his special learning needs individually catered in class. Of the six women, two were young and single; two were married with young children; and two were mothers not living with the father of their children.

Problems with schooling

The majority of this group had had problems in their schooling. One had had an unsettled childhood and got caught up with gangs and became a problem and dropped out. Another had experienced substance abuse in the home and in herself since the age of 10 years, so was not interested in school and dropped out. One was sent to an alternative school because she was in conflict with the staff of the regular school. One felt she had problems in school and should have had extra attention, but did not receive it so she fell behind and dropped out. Another came from a home where the mother tongue was not English and the family went and lived abroad for a year which put her behind in school when they returned to Canada. She was tall for her age and known as the "dumb kid". She would fight back and ended up being sent home and missing school. She went to a special school where the students were allowed to cheat. She said she was a Grade 5 dropout but promoted to Grade 7. The sixth woman had been in "slow classes" all the time and quit in Grade 8. One of the men said he was beaten up on his second day of school and made to wear a dunce's cap. He had a modified Grade 10, but was "really much lower".

Motivations for coming to ABE

One woman had broken up with her boyfriend and had to start supporting herself. She had wanted to get a GED as a starting-point for a job, but tested at a Grade 5 level and was told to go to the literacy class. Another woman was trying to get her life in order. Her three children had been taken away from her and were in a home. She went to AA regularly and was thinking of becoming a drug and alcohol counsellor. For that, she needed more education. Her assessment was, "You have to want to do it." This was echoed by another woman who said, "I wanted to do it for myself." One woman said, "Being illiterate and wanting to go to school is like AA - you want to go, you don't want to go." Two of the women wanted to do it for the sake of their children as well as for themselves. One said, "My goal is to be the first in my family to actually get my Grade 12 (GED)." The other had seen or heard through the media of an illiterate woman who overdosed herself because she could not read the medication label. This gave her a jolt and as she was going through divorce proceedings she was also receiving legal documents from her ex-husband's lawyer and needed to understand what was being written.

Reliance on others

Most of the people in this group relied on others - a spouse or other family members to help them with paperwork. They also said that they used the telephone a lot. Many of them said they knew others with literacy problems. "Those who acted up in school and left early are now in their twenties and illiterate." "Lots of people in the bush have these problems and they can't help their kids." "There are lots of people around, but they don't come to programs because of feelings of shame and inferiority." "Sometimes, expectations are too high and people become discouraged."

Employment obtained

The jobs done by this group included working in a fish-packing plant, being a chambermaid, dishwashing, waitressing, "working with horses", and homemaking. The men worked in wood-related industries and janitorial positions. One man currently had his own business.

Reactions to ABE literacy programs

Four of the women and one of the men were participating in a one-to-one tutorial type of program. The others were in class situations. Some of the tutoring was done in a learning centre with a variety of people rather than on a matched one-to-one. These people liked the flexibility and individual attention they received. They were all pleased with the atmosphere and with their progress. Their self-esteem had been boosted. One woman said that she wanted "to learn overnight" and was upset that it was taking so long, but that she had settled down now. One young woman in a part-time class situation wanted it to be full-time; she felt progress was too slow. She wanted to get Grade 12 so she could go into bookkeeping or nursing. She also felt that instructors needed to be more strict about homework and attendance. Another comment from someone who attended a literacy class under "Special Education" was that she felt people were staring at her when she came out of class. "Do they think I'm queer or something? I can't read, that's my problem . . . I go in late and I leave early so people won't know I'm in that class." (Similar comments to this have been made to the writer on other occasions by past participants.)

The two participants in the class with the Life Skills component really appreciated its inclusion. Both of them said that they never would have been able to talk to the writer the way they had, if the interview had been held two months earlier.

Program strengths

What did these people like about their programs that they thought would attract others? The list included: relaxed atmosphere, working at own pace, anonymity (of one-to-one tutoring), flexible schedule, free service, caring instructors, tutors who became like a friend, storefront location, computers.

Recruitment

In answer to the question: "How can more people be reached?", advertising was high on the list. Most people found out about the program through someone else, although one of the mothers learned of the program through a brochure brought home from school by one of her children. Most did not know the programs existed. Comments made were: "People need to know about the services", "They don't advertise this place", "I couldn't find it in the telephone book", "People weren't sure whether the program was still going", and "I walked past the building several times, then I wondered what it did."

A long list of what else was needed to make programs effective also developed out of the group and personal interviews. As there was some repetition from respondents in other groups, the list will be presented later in this report.

Summary

The participants represent the most motivated and determined of the low-literate population. They have to have courage and stamina. In many cases, "the odds are heroic" as Mezirow (1985) said, yet people are willing "to enter the game." In many cases, it seems that circumstances impel them to take the step of registering. In others, they are urged by agency workers. Chances of success are probably best when attitudinal, environmental and educational program circumstances all come together in the right mix for certain individuals. But, what of the nonparticipants? How do they perceive the game?

THE NONPARTICIPANTS

PERSONAL INTERVIEW SAMPLE - MALE NPS

The ten men in this group were extremely interesting. Four were from Vancouver Island locations, three from Vancouver, one from the Northwest, and two from the Selkirk region. Five of them were currently married. Four of the five had dependent children. The fifth had not yet had any children. Two were divorced with children and grandchildren. Two were single and one had a common-law relationship. One was Native; one had been born in England; two were born in the USA; the rest were born in Canada, but five of them were born in provinces other than British Columbia. Four of the men said they had been in and out of foster homes. Another two had "done time". Three of them had had substance abuse problems in the past. Two of them said they were dyslexic and four of them were left-handed.

Five of the men were working. Two of them had their own businesses in partnership with other men. One was a commercial fisherman. One was working as a janitor and his income was being "topped up" by the Ministry of Social Services and Housing (MSSH). One was a delivery truck driver. One of the men was on unemployment benefits as he was a seasonal worker in the fisheries. The other four men were on income assistance. All had worked in the past. The kinds of jobs they had had in the past included logging, ditch-digging, exterior painting, furniture moving, truck driving, ambulance attendant and janitorial work.

Two of the men left school to work on farms and these same two men fought in the Korean War. One had wanted to go into the Navy but was not accepted because a Grade 10 level of education was required, so he went into the army. Another man got around the Grade 10 requirement for a railway job by getting his friend to fill out the application form. Where "education level" was demanded he told his friend to put "half of Grade 12". (He had a Grade 6 education! But, he got the job and held it for three years.) One of the other men who had been installing office lights for a company was offered his own truck and a greater measure of job responsibility which entailed filling out order forms, invoicing and so on. He said, "I couldn't handle the success. I went on a three day drunk and disappeared." When he came out of it, he telephoned the company who urged him to come back and take the job, but his illiteracy was really the impediment. He refused the job.

Three of the men were active in their communities. One had run for political office and was respected by his peers. Another was on the Board of Directors of a community group and an active church member. Another was also active in his community, especially in teaching crafts to children. Many of the men were quite talented. One was a painter, another worked with ceramics and his work was in demand. One person had taught himself how to play the violin and also enjoyed photography. Two people played the guitar. Two of the men enjoyed "tinkering" with mechanical parts and cars and one of these also built house models. One of the men also enjoyed baking bread.

Of the total sample of ten in this group, maybe half of them would consider going to an ABE Literacy program. One of the men was acting as a househusband while his wife went back to ABE to pursue her goal of becoming a nurse. He had two pre-school children to look after. He would have liked to go to school on a part-time basis, but said he was told by MSSH that he could not attend school part-time. Daycare and transportation were also problems.

Three of the men were considering taking advantage of one-to-one tutoring programs which were just getting established. Two of the men wanted the flexibility of arranging their own time and place and wanted to go at their own pace. (Both of these men were the ones who said they were dyslexic.) The third man was so afraid of having his "cover" blown and being thought "dumb" by those he knew, that the privacy of the one-to-one arrangement appealed to him. One of the other men - the fisherman - wanted to upgrade his math to get into a trades course but found course scheduling did not fit his seasonal work schedule. He was free from May to October.

The other five men appeared to be proudly independent and saw no real need for ABE. They made comments such as the following.
"You need Grade 12 to be a doorman, now."
"I was a man when I was 12 years old - working on the land."
"I have a worldly education."
"There are no benefits in going back to school."
"I am successful so far, why do I need an education?"
"Education corrupts people. Educated people have their hand out for the almighty dollar and they forget their fellow human beings. We are destroying the planet."
"Everything is becoming computerized, there is no concern for people. Older people are not being protected."
"The welfare system is a system of social control - it's like serfdom in medieval times. Instead of giving your produce to the lord of the manor, you check in once a month to an office so they know what you are up to."
"I wouldn't go to school. People would know I was dumb."
"We really need job-training to counteract credentialling."
"Why go to school for four years? What's at the end of it? I know people with 2 year college degrees and there's no jobs for them. They do what I do."
"I'm an independent handyman type, I like practical "how-to" things."
In addition, some of them quoted "pride", "temper", and "impatience" as reasons for not participating.

Some of these men rely on others to perform literacy tasks for them. One of the men has "a lady-friend who was a teacher" and, "she helps me out." Another depends on his wife and "camouflages" his poor spelling by just "squiggling" his writing. One man had considered taking a course at the local college but had no transportation and the scheduling was wrong. Despite the bravado however, two of the men seemed to weaken at the end of the interview. As the writer was leaving his home, one of the younger ones said, "I know I'll have to go back [to school] one day." The other one said, "Where would I go if I wanted to go back?" Both these men had had bad school experiences and the bitterness had carried over and stayed with them in their adult life.

Summary

This group had had tough lives. Circumstances forced some of them to drop out of school when they were young to go to work. Some went to special schools or classes and dropped out early. Others had put in time at school and got a Grade 10 or Grade 12 education but knew they were being pushed through. They all had had to make it on their own. Some were successful. They were a talented group taken altogether, and had a sense of community responsibility. The ones with past histories of jail or substance abuse were married or in relationships and had been going straight for some time. They had overcome or were working on their problems. Collectively, the group's work histories were varied and broken with spells of unemployment because of the seasonality of the jobs, or layoffs because of changes in technology.

Specific reasons for not participating in programs were - lack of transportation, daycare problems, program scheduling, fatigue after working all day, lack of time associated with the knowledge that returning to learn would require much effort and be a long haul, but by far the biggest barrier appeared to be attitudinal. The men saw no use in schooling. Many of them were able to read for their own needs, and had people who helped them when they were in difficulties especially with their writing and spelling. Some of them felt that improving their literacy skills would help them in their roles as parents and community members. The younger men could see a relationship between more education and improved job opportunities, but they wanted literacy to be related to job training. Literacy for them had to have an economic purpose. Non-traditional ABE programs seemed to be most appealing, that is, one-to-one tutoring, and drop-in learning centres where flexibility of arrangements and hours are assured. Two of the men in more isolated towns suggested toll-free telephone tutoring might work. (They were both in the higher educational group - Grades 9 - 12).

These men are probably closest to Beder and Quigley's (1990) resisters. Unless attitudes and perceptions of the relevance of ABE are changed there may be little hope for recruiting older male nonparticipants into traditional ABE programs. Some of them, however, maybe lured into alternative kinds of literacy programming.

PERSONAL INTERVIEW SAMPLE - FEMALE NPS

Compared with the male NPs, the female group had a higher level of education and were younger. Their ages ranged from 19 years to 51 years. All eight women were single. Seven of them were mothers and six of them still had children at home. In this group, two were from the Vancouver location, the remaining six were from small towns. Five of them were born in or had lived in other provinces. Three of these five had come back to their hometowns when their marriages broke up in order to be closer to their families. All three had dependent children.

The reasons for quitting school originally were varied: two women became pregnant at age 15; three quit because they had to go out to work to help their families in time of crisis; one quit because she was a "know-it-all" and wanted to leave "the pit" [the town]; one quit because she had "a problem with my Dad" and went to live with her boyfriend; the youngest woman in the group had gone to Grade 12, but had had difficulties in school.

Five of these women mentioned daycare as a problem and a deterrent to returning to school. The availability and affordability were both issues. Three of them relied on family members to babysit, but indicated that daycare would be a problem if they moved away to another centre.

All these women were on some kind of income assistance. Only two of the women were working and being "topped up". One of these women best exhibited some of the traits of the male NP group - spunky character and independently minded. The most common kinds of jobs these people had were as waitresses, or working in stores. One had had a stint as a hairdresser, but had developed allergies and quit. She then worked in a hospital setting in a unionized job with benefits. She thus had a point of reference for her present situation and said, "Single women and parents cannot afford part-time jobs, because there are no benefits."

Apart from the two women who were already working part-time, three others were making real efforts to find work or make themselves more employable. One young woman was interested in landscaping and had taken a home study course on landscaping and plant propagation and had subsequently enrolled in a short course on landscaping at the local college. She was interested in working in a plant nursery, but there were no such nurseries in her town. Ideally, she would like to own her own plant shop. She did not think she was a good reader or writer, but said she liked bookkeeping. She also made stuffed toys as a hobby. Another woman was working towards taking her GED. She then hoped to get a job in a travel agency. An older woman had taken a Job Action course which had raised her self-esteem and given her the confidence to try to obtain a job. However, she felt that her age was against her. She would have preferred a job to going back to school, but was considering being a long-term careworker. The training for this four month course required a Grade 10 entry level which she did not have, but she said that she would consider going into ABE to attain that level if necessary.

The remaining three women included the two youngest. One of these was at home with her two pre-school children, but hoped eventually to go back to school. The other one had not found work since leaving school, and appeared to have no particular aims or ambitions. The third woman characterized herself as "a 49 year old unemployable". Other comments she made were, "I'm tired. I'm burned out. My values are changing right now and I'm having difficulty focussing." This woman had worked actively in the community as a volunteer and was articulate despite her lower level of formal education than others in the group. Fears and anxiety were uppermost in her mind. She thought women returning to school after being out for a long time would need help with pre-study skills, counselling and personal support. A buddy-system approach would help with the latter, she thought, and "instruction should begin with where the learner is at." Clothing was seen as a problem as well.

The two who were working part-time said they had no time for school. They had to work and get on with their lives. One of the women who was 37 years old said that younger people are favoured in the job market and that "married women with children are a fatality in the job market." She talked about the "fears" of going back to school and the "stress factor" and the long time required to get anywhere. "If I got a Grade 12, I'd be several years older and then where would I go? Nowhere. I'd have no experience except what I've already done, so I'd be back to square one. The circle is closed before you get into it. More practical job training experience is required."

Most of the women, despite admitted reading and writing difficulties said they read to their children. They saw the importance of education for their own children.

If they don't recognize words when reading out loud, they invent them. Writing skills were described as "so-so", and "poor". "A letter from me says - 'Hi. How are you? It snowed. Bye.'," said one woman.

Summary

The majority of these women were in the position of being sole support parents. They were more job-oriented than education-oriented. Two of them felt their ages (51 years and 37 years) were factors against them in the job market. Because most of the group were from small centres, they were up against restricted job openings. They were also up against less accessible or suitable course offerings. The smaller demand for certain courses is a determinant in which centre actually offers a particular course. If it is in a neighbouring town, transportation and daycare then become problems for this group. Yet, few of the women are willing to move. Only the older woman said she would be prepared to do this if she could get work. The others wanted to be close to friends and family and thought the smaller centres were preferable to "the big city." Life circumstances or situational barriers appeared to be the major reasons for nonparticipation among these women, but some of them could be resisters as well.

THE TELEPHONE SURVEY OF NONREGISTRANTS

THE SAMPLE

This survey came about through a suggestion from the ABE Department of Camosun College, as an alternative method of reaching nonparticipants when classroom visits had yielded only two suggestions for interviewees in this category. This population of nonregistrants had been motivated in some way or by someone to go as far as writing the placement tests at Camosun College, but then not going the next step of actually registering. Thus, this group was hovering on the brink of participation but had not taken the plunge into ABE. It was felt that some useful insights might be gained for both the college and the project if this population could be interviewed.

There were 90 names listed in the target population - those who had placed at BASD or ABE Introductory English between September 1, 1988 to August 31, 1989 and had not registered at the College by January 1990 according to the college computers. Of these people, 68 had taken the test in 1989 and 22 in 1988. Of the 90 names, 19 became the survey sample. Table 10 shows how the number was reduced.

TABLE 10. Attrition of Nonregistrant Target Population (N = 90)

Item	N
No phone numbers given	8
Wrong phone number/not known	14
Numbers not in service	13
Not reached after 3 calls at varying times or no call back	13
Moved away	6
Had actually registered	6
Had registered and withdrawn	3
Balance of 1988 sample not contacted because of time constraints	7
Discounted because psychotic	1
Survey sample	19
Total	90

Of the 19 nonregistrants 14 were men and 5 were women. Eleven had placed in BASD and 8 in ABE Introductory English. Nine of the people were under 30 years old; 8 were between 30 and 45 years old; one was 61 years old, and no age was given for the other nonregistrant. The psychotic person was a man whose mother answered the phone and said they were told that the college did not have the facilities to handle him.

RESULTS

The survey sample's reasons for taking the assessment tests at the college are given in Table 11 under headings assigned by the writer.

TABLE 11. Reasons of Nonregistrants for Taking Assessment Tests at the College (N = 19)

Motivation	N
Educational advancement:	
- want Grade 12;	5
- want Grade 10;	2
- want to get into ABE.	1
Wanted career course:	
- long-term care aide;	3
- other.	2
Literacy development:	
- learn to spell;	1
- improve reading comprehension.	1
Family Responsibility and Literacy:	
- learn to read to help 18 year old son to read.	1
Self-Improvement:	
- "to find my levels";	2
- "to see what I could do".	
Other:	
- Native program promised.	1

The means of referral to the college are shown in Table 12. Of the self-referrals, two were the oldest people in the sample (61 years and 45 years) but the other three were 20 years of age or younger. One of the Native referrals was the 35 year old woman who wanted to help her son read. (See Table 11.)

TABLE 12. Referrals of Nonregistrants to the College (N = 19)

Means	N
Self	5
Schools - teachers and counsellors	3
EIC	2
MSSH	1
College Job Search course	2
Workstreams program	1
Career Options program	1
READ (Community literacy program)	1
Native Band office	2
Sister at college	1

Of the 19 persons in the survey sample, one person had tried to register, but he was unsuccessful because of a waitlist. The reasons for not registering in the college programs are given in Table 13.

TABLE 13. Reasons of Nonregistrants for Not Registering (N = 19)

Reason	N
Work-related (got a job, lost job and retrained)	7
Financial need (no sponsorship, no money)	4
Transportation (4 buses each way, no car)	2
Health (back injury)	1
Unrealistic expectations/disappointments	3
Institutional - interdepartmental and interagency conflict	2
Lack of follow-up	2
Native class did not materialize	1
Waitlist at college	1
Total	23

Note: Some respondents gave two reasons.

The "Unrealistic expectations/disappointments" category in Table 13 presented three different cases. One was a 42 year old man who wanted to get his Grade 12 to become a physical education teacher. He placed at the BASD level. His comment was that they were a one-income family and he could not afford to put himself through school for the time required. Another respondent was a 44 year old woman who wanted to be an Aide. She believed she had adequate English skills for the program, but she placed at ABE Introductory English. Her comment was that she felt she would not pass the English course nor learn anything from it. The third person wanted Grade 12 in order to enter a dental assistant program, but the low placement - ABE Introductory English - caused her to take a high school biology course and do some more thinking. She was 19 years old.

The "Lack of follow-up" category involved the older woman and one of the Native women. They had both been told that someone would get back to them, but they said nobody had, and they had not followed up themselves. The older woman was given an option of classes or one-to-one tutoring. The Native woman's class involved an off-campus centre.

The "conflicts" involved two people who felt their assessment placements contradicted their prior experience. One had finished a basic vocational skill course (BVSD) and was told he was ready for ABE Introductory, but the assessment placed him in BASD and this conflicting situation deterred him from enrolling. The other man was also placed in BASD, but he maintained he had received Grade 10 and Grade 12 results at another program and he was "not going to start at Grade 8."

Of the 19 respondents, 12 said they had never been to other ABE programs while 7 had. Three of the Natives had taken courses offered on their reserves. One person had gone to a community literacy program; another had gone to an alternate school; and two persons had been to Camosun College before.

When asked would they try to register at the college in the future, four of the sample said they would in 1990, eleven said they would later. Two said they would not, but one was moving out of the province. There was one conditional answer - dependent on the outcome of surgery. One gave no answer.

The things that would have made it easier for these people to come to college related mainly to their reasons for not registering. Three people mentioned financial assistance would be necessary - living allowance and tuition fee payment. Two wanted better transportation (bus routes) or a closer location. One person said, "Get rid of timed tests." (The woman with the English difficulties.) Two suggestions related to waitlists - "Get rid of them!" and, "Schedule more classes." Four of the suggestions related to work regimes - shifts and seasonal work. The "seasonals" wanted to come to college for one season. Some wanted evening classes and "classes at a mutually convenient time." Problems occur for people who work one shift time for a month and then another shift time the next month, and also for those who work a "10 days on, 4 days off" type of shift.

In the general comments, eight people suggested more and better advertising of courses and programs with more specific information to reduce "the runaround". Five wanted improved student loan and financial assistance programs. Three made comments about removing embarrassment and fear as much as possible. One person does not like the testing conditions at the Assessment Centre. He cannot do well under time pressure and with a lot of people in the room. The Native woman wanted to help children on the reserve to read. Four others made comments on children in the regular school system: "Encourage them to plan their futures"; "Tell children to stay in school so they don't have the problem as adults"; "Schooling must include mandatory English, social studies and civics"; "Students must know and get the right prerequisites for the courses they want to take." The youngest person in the group (18 years), however, said that she thought she could get a good-paying job with her Grade 7 education "by having a good relationship with the manager." (She was currently a dishwasher.)

DISCUSSION OF SURVEY

The attrition of the target sample population is noteworthy - only 21 percent of the 90 names on the list actually formed the survey sample. The previous study by the College's Assessment Centre also showed attrition of the target sample population, (Assessment Centre, 1989). That study was geared to persons who were placed in ABE Introductory or ABE Intermediate level courses. Thus, their target sample represented a group with slightly higher education achievements and skills than the one for this survey. The findings, however, point to an extremely mobile or transient element within these groups of nonregistrants. There were many Native people in the target sample for this telephone survey which is worth mentioning, because readers may not have expected that from Victoria. The only known socio-demographic variable in the target sample was age. However, at least 12 of the 90 persons on the original list were Native. From the responses received, it is evident that there were plans to offer at least one Native class off-campus. This plan then could partially account for some of the Native nonregistrants. Some of these people had given the Native Friendship Centre or other places as contact numbers.

Of those who were contacted in the final telephone survey sample, the presence of a goal-orientation is well marked (13 out of 19 had a specific educational or career goal). The "magic" of having a Grade 12 is evident. Although the sample is very small, it tends to follow the findings of the U.S. studies which say that the GED is a major motivator for participation in ABE.

In the previous college study, a much higher number of people tried to register but were unsuccessful. In this survey, only one person was in this category and the reason given was the waitlist. This was only one factor of several in the previous study. However, the writer was told that there is a long waitlist for BASD classes. As the literacy issue receives more publicity, the problem of waitlists is likely to be exacerbated, especially in the light of the finding that 15 of the 19 in the survey sample said they would try to register at the college again - four of them in 1990. The difference between the intention to do so and actually doing so, however, has already been noted (chapter II).

For those who did not try to register, work-related reasons were most often quoted. This finding is similar to the one in the previous college study. However, this survey differs from the previous one in the higher place given to financial reasons for not registering. One could consider transportation as a financial element as well - if people were really motivated and could afford a car, then presumably transportation would disappear as a barrier per se. As it is, for people living in the outlying areas of the Greater Victoria Region - the Western Communities, or the Saanich Peninsula, the bus services are too infrequent, too complicated and time-consuming to get to the city campuses on a regular daily basis. Comments on transportation and health did not appear to surface in the previous study.

It would seem that there are always a few people for whom the testing procedures are frightening or off-putting. The timed conditions and the confusion over levels were noted in this survey. In the previous study there were also quotes such as "test unfair", or "placement level confusing" from one or two persons. We know that many low-literate adults have low self-esteem and many anxieties already. For some adults, a testing procedure in a room with other people would be a major ordeal. Perhaps some kind of mediator or peer counsellor is required.

In this survey, the nonregistrant population was looked upon as a segment of the nonparticipant population. However, their reasons for not registering parallel many given by people who have withdrawn from programs. This problem of attrition will be examined next.

V. FINDINGS - PROGRAM ATTRITION

Procedures to obtain field information on this topic were threefold: (a) questionnaire to college ABE Administrators and Instructors; (b) personal interview sample of 34 withdrawals; and (c) telephone survey of dropouts of a mid-sized school district program.

THE ADMINISTRATORS' AND INSTRUCTORS' QUESTIONNAIRES

REASONS FOR DROPOUT

Seven college Administrators and nine college Instructors answered the section on Attrition in the questionnaire. The Administrators generated a longer list of perceived reasons for adults leaving literacy programs than the instructors. In both groups, however, the main reasons were perceived to be related to economic need, for example, "got a full-time job." Financial need of itself, however, was also mentioned several times. A combined list of the reasons is given in Table 14.

In the "Personal and family problems" category one respondent mentioned the domestic turmoil and shifting power relationships which may ensue within a family if one partner becomes more educated and independent than another. Another respondent said that a single parent who left her young children at home to come to class felt guilty and left.

In the "Program-related" category, the first three responses related to inappropriate programs and approaches which gave "offence" or generated "dislike" of instructor.

TABLE 14. ABE Professionals' Perceived Reasons for Dropout from Adult Literacy Programs

Reason	N
Economic need:	
- get a job and leave.	9
Financial problems:	
- lose UIC if continue;	2
- lack of funds, etc.	5
Lack of support systems:	
- general;	2
- daycare.	2
Personal and family problems:	
- general;	4
- ill health;	2
- psychiatric care;	1
- legal troubles.	1
Psychological (fear of success, etc.)	3
Multiple problems:	
- general;	1
- frustrations/demands on time;	1
- can't cope with job, family and school.	2
Program-related:	
- general;	3
- learning difficulties;	1
- slow progress;	2
- unrealistic expectations.	2

The College of New Caledonia (1988) conducted a study of its English 010 classes from January 1986 to April 1988. These classes cover the beginning grades up to the Grade 6 level. They discovered that of those who entered at the Grade 1 or 2 level, 66 percent never completed for the following reasons: emotional or mental instability; alcoholism; mentally incapable; frustration when starting with so few skills; and moving away.

The length of program was a factor in dropout in this study. For those who entered at the lowest level, 17 percent completed the class in 8 to 10 months and another 17 percent moved into a job training class after 6 months in the English 010 class. Of the students entering at the Grade 3 level, 43 percent completed in six months, but when attendance time was increased by 2 to 4 months, the completion rate for students at that level rose to 66 percent. For those entering at a Grade 4 or 5 level, the completion rate was 93 percent - 50 percent completed in two months or less, and 35 percent completed in six to eight months, the remainder completed in three or four months.

Attrition rates

Attempts were made to gather statistics of enrollment and withdrawal from college literacy classes. Only five Administrators answered the question about availability of statistics on dropout/retention. Three answers indicated that there were little or no data. One person said the data were not pulled together, but could be and another administrator said it would be possible with two weeks notice. This whole area is fraught with difficulties.

Instructors did provide some statistics for their own classes. As these classes represent different kinds of delivery, levels and approaches, they are not really comparable across the province. However, rates seemed to vary from 0 attrition to about 37 percent. The mode and the median appeared to be 17 percent and the mean 18 percent for the classes reported. (Most of these were for the September to December 1989 period.) In an overall college study of program attrition/retention Camosun College found a 60 percent retention rate in ABE and college prep programs for the period September 1987 to April 1988 (Beatty-Guenter, 1988).

There were reasons given for 20 withdrawals: 11 were job-related; 2 were because of sickness; 3 transferred to other classes within the college; 2 had moved away; one was "terminated because of poor attendance"; one did not see the need for upgrading at his particular age.

In chapter two, mention was made of the difficulty of getting in touch with withdrawals from a one-to-one tutoring program. However, one tutoring outreach program provided some information on its seven withdrawals during the most recent year. One person had family problems and a new tutor as the former one had moved away, thus it was easier to drop out. One was killed in a car accident. One woman had emotional problems due to separation from her husband. Another woman had alcohol-related problems. The remaining three were not motivated enough, so there was a lack of commitment to the learning process.

Return of dropouts

In answer to the question whether ABE dropouts later return to continue their learning, most people said "Yes", but added some qualifiers: "Those who actively worked [in class] do, those who didn't, don't"; "Yes, but rare if they're at the Grade 1 or 2 level." One Administrator said she didn't know, but believed they did. Another Administrator said, "Don't know." Yet another said "Yes, a lot do, some after 1 or 2 years, some 8 or 10 years later."

PERSONAL INTERVIEW SAMPLE - WITHDRAWALS

As a group, this one was the most culturally diverse. There were nine Natives altogether - two females and seven males, although two of the males were of mixed ethnic parentage. There were two male immigrants who had been in the country a long time - one of these was Anglophone and the other an ESL immigrant. The group also included six women of Doukhobor background. The group contained many of the younger members in the total sample as well as the 17 year old. The Doukhobor women were all in the 45 - 55 age range and were the oldest members within this group. The oldest male was about 45 years old. There were four people with severe learning disabilities - two men and two women.

THE DOUKHOBOR WOMEN - A SPECIAL CASE

The old generation of Doukhobors was against school so their children had very little or no schooling. One woman went as far as Grade 9, but her mother was a widow so presumably there was less opposition in the absence of the father. The mother did not believe in extended education, however, and the woman quit to go to work. She had worked most of her life. Another woman said she went as far as Grade 8 but had to travel to another centre for this schooling and stayed in residence. Two of the remaining women said they had had no schooling but had taught themselves to read. Another woman said that her mother had taught her the alphabet and that she had attended school for six months in Grade 3. The other woman had had one year of schooling.

The woman who had Grade 8 education said that her family had left the old Doukhobor community. She felt education was very important and was proud of the fact that two of her sons were studying at university. The woman with the Grade 3 education also felt that she was apart from the community because she had lived in other cities in Canada for many years, but she and her family had come back to the area of her childhood.

In talking about how the older generation managed without literacy, one of the women made the following comments, "People learn through other senses. They memorize. The community life is based on the families, meetings, singing, spiritual values and Russian teaching. There is no need for reading, if you've never had it." This woman, however, said she herself read. She liked *Harlequin Romances*, *Life* magazine and reading about the religions of the world. She characterized her reading as "fast, but not always accurate," and writing "was a chore."

Two of the women were working in Home Support Services, a third had been doing similar work, but was now on income assistance because of ill-health. The other women were active in the community - in fund-raising and singing, and in arts and crafts and baking. Many of them get requests to do catering for stores and for local events, and some exhibit their crafts, flower arrangements and preserves at country fairs. Many of the men are skilled carpenters and carvers.

How did these women become ABE dropouts?

In the early 1980s, the college mounted a literacy class at one of its centres. Many of these women were among the first enrollees in that class. They were all fee-payers at one time, but as some individual circumstances changed - unemployment or ill-health of their husbands - some of the women got sponsorship or grants. Three of them said the fees had presented problems for them. One of the women was a widow struggling to make ends meet and bring up her children. In the cases of the other women, their husbands lost their jobs or were only seasonally employed in construction, or in logging industries, so the fees were an added burden.

Transportation was a problem for one of the women. One quit the program for health reasons. One quit because her husband's health problems meant he could not work and she had to return to the labour force. All of the women were in the program for at least two years. Three of them continued for longer and entered ABE Intermediate. Despite the problems they mentioned, there were other underlying causes for dropout: a change in the program; and realizations that are common to other ABE students.

At a time of financial restraint the centre's instructional staff was cut back. The literacy instructor was an older woman, close to retirement and was let go. When she left, there was only one instructor to handle everything in the centre. These women then missed the individual attention they had received. Also, as they progressed they were automatically mixing with students of younger age and higher levels. Some of them felt they were under pressure and being "pushed" although they were told to work at their own pace. Some of their comments were: "It was hard to keep up with the young students," and "I would like a group of my own age." "I felt rushed," said another, and there was "not enough time for individual help." "The other instructor was too high a level for me. I spent a lot of time sitting with no work," said another. One of the women came to realize the "impossibility of getting Grade 12 in the time available, and there are no jobs anyway." She also disliked the "frustration of not grasping fast enough."

Despite these comments, however, all of the women improved their literacy skills, were glad of the experience and three of them said they would go back if the classes were free. "I loved school. I loved the teachers," said one woman. "I liked the nice atmosphere," said another, and added, "the instructors were like friends you would invite over for coffee." "I was glad I came and sorry I left," said another. Others said: "I came to learn for myself, once you get involved you enjoy it." "I can write letters now, but not with perfect spelling, and I can figure out the best buys." "It was good to have the class here. It would have been impossible to have gone into town."

THE LEARNING DISABLED

Of the remaining 9 women, 2 were learning disabled. One had gone to college for a year but had stopped going because she said it was hard work. She felt "exhausted" and "needed a break." "It takes energy to stay in class." This woman castigated the school system. "Teachers are not allowed to teach phonics, it's all visual. A dyslexic can't rely on sight vision." She was angry because "Nothing's changed. My daughter's going through the same thing I did and I'm fighting with the teachers. They refuse to acknowledge that she is dyslexic. They say she has a 'learning problem'. Dyslexics are not stupid. They need help to learn in other ways. Every Grade 1 teacher should receive training to recognize and cope with the problem."

Although these quotes are attributed to this woman, similar comments were made to this writer by all other dyslexics who had children in the school system. They want a better deal for their children and are frustrated when they see no apparent changes in the system since their own childhood.

The other woman had a different kind of learning disability. She had volunteered for the interview because she felt that by sharing her story it might help others. "You can't imagine the shame and embarrassment I feel. I virtually cheated my way through school and it was not until Grade 12 that one of my subject teachers (i.e. other than English) told me I had a problem." (This woman had had problems with English as a child since Grade 2, but as her family was very mobile, she never stayed in any one school long enough for the problem to be detected.) "I can't read to my nieces - I stumble over the words, skip them and mispronounce them." She had tried first year college university-transfer courses, but "cheated and covered up" to get through. Her parents evidently did not know she had a problem. Her husband thinks she's "OK", but she knows she isn't: "I cry with frustration." She works and has a bright, personable manner and, perhaps because of her travels, has more "savoir-faire" than the "average" ABE person.

On her own initiative, she went to a local educational centre and asked to be put through the assessment tests in order to locate her problem. Her oral comprehension was excellent; she was reading at a Grade 7 - 8 level, but was "severely disabled" in other areas. She has no word attack skills or decoding ability. She went to the local college, was asked to read a passage and asked whether she understood it. She said "yes", but evidently did not. She was told, "OK, you don't have a problem," and was assigned to ABE Intermediate. She does not feel that that is the most appropriate route for her. She would like a regular one-to-one tutor who could give her the specific individual help she needs. She wants to help herself, but can the system help her?

Two of the men were dyslexic. One had been to the local college for a year (September to April), the other had been in and out of college several times. One was a married family man, the other lived at home with his parents. The married man was seasonally employed and did not go back to college as he was looking for work. Tutoring seemed to be "the answer" for him - or night classes (after 7 p.m.) where he could get individual help. He objected to the 18 - 19 year old high school dropouts who enter ABE and act as though "the world owed them a living." They are "immature, want to socialize, and disrupt the class." This man's wife and children are also dyslexic. The whole family was assessed by a diagnostic service in another town. This man would like better diagnostic counselling and information services closer to home. A drop-in centre which could provide help and peer support would be useful, and "no time pressure to complete studies by the agencies."

The other man was a most severely disabled dyslexic who was reading at a Grade 1 - 2 level and not able to make much progress. He arrived at the interview with all his reports and assessment history since childhood. He was in his late 20s. He had applied for a disability allowance, but was told he was "teachable" and therefore the disability allowance did not apply. "Here's the proof," he said, "What am I supposed to do?" His work history had been one of varied short-term and emergency-type jobs. His mental health had been affected by his situation. Yet this man, evidently, has a mechanical aptitude and "can fix car starters, repair electric coffee pots and make lamps." He also said he had a friend who was good mechanically and took a mechanics course, but failed it because of his reading difficulties. "Yet he repairs motors for his friends."

These mini-profiles are offered because 8 of the total interview sample of 61 persons (13 percent) were genuinely learning disabled. They are a subgroup within ABE programs and likely always will be, unless the school system takes measures to somehow redress the problems. Yet, can ABE offer these people a second chance? It can give some of them "a home" for a while, but many "don't want to be shortchanged." If one-to-one tutoring is seen as the answer, then the tutors will require special training.

THE STOPOUTS

This heading seems to best characterize the remaining withdrawals. These people had not "dropped out" forever. In nearly all cases, circumstances had forced them to stop coming to class and later they decided to return. Some of them seemed to have the habit more of "dropping in." Three of the women and eleven of the men were again participating or just about to participate in an ABE literacy class or tutorial arrangement. In addition, three of the men appeared to come and go when it suited them. These latter three had access to a drop-in learning situation. Two other men and two of the women said they would "go back" again. Thus 21 out of 24 withdrawals had returned or had the intention to return to ABE. If the three Doukhobor women and two of the learning disabled are added, the total of those who are participating or would return is increased to 26 out of the 34 total withdrawal sample.

The sample is no doubt "skewed" because the people were chosen for the writer and it was easier for instructors to contact people with a known history of dropout who were already in programs or about to enter. Nevertheless, this sample represents a slice of the ABE population and illustrates conditions facing the clients and practitioners. The agency people did not necessarily know that there was a history of dropout in their referrals and nothing was known about the self-referrals until the interviews took place.

It is easiest to deal with the three of the 24 remaining withdrawals who said they would or could not go back. One was a man who had been in the program a number of years ago, but then had suddenly taken ill and was in hospital for two months. He has not worked for several years. He sits in a house "full of books" and watches TV. His wife works. His mother sent him to the interview. There was a problem in that he would not or could not open up. He seemed to have some kind of massive memory loss. He had not been able to read since his illness. He knew where to come for the interview, but said he did not know his way to the next town. It is likely he had been in a coma and suffered brain damage as a result. In that case some repatterning on an intensive one-to-one basis might be required. There was currently no tutoring service in his community.

Of the two women, one was in her 50s and lived in a low-income housing unit. She had gone to ABE on a full-time basis, but had dropped out after one month as she found it "too much to handle emotionally and academically." This woman, although born in Canada, had come from an ESL family background. She had gone as far as Grade 8 in public school. She quoted personal problems, her health and age as reasons for not going back to ABE. "What will I do with a Grade 12 now? Who would hire a 50 year old woman? Besides, there's the problem of transportation, and repaying loans. How could you repay a loan without a job?"

The other woman was close to 30 years old and had had a checkered school history. She did not like school, had been sent to a boarding school in another province, and had eventually quit in Grade 8. She went to ABE as a fee-payer when she was married and "housewifey". Her husband could afford the fees. She quit because she "found it boring," and then she was divorced. She tried ABE again at another centre, that time on a student loan, but she found the math difficult and quit. She characterized herself as a "practical" type with "a low tolerance level" and wanted more individual attention. The math had to be practical and useful, not abstract. (She was in Fundamental Math.) She would work in a group "if they were all at the same level." She had taken a non-traditional trades course, but not been offered a job because she was "a little woman." Her priority was to find a job.

Reasons for dropout

The reasons of the remaining 21 withdrawals for dropping out are given in Table 15.

TABLE 15. Reasons for ABE Dropout by Interview Sample (N = 21)

Reasons	N
Work related	5
Program related	3
Personal/family problems/health	5
Alcoholism and drugs	2
Financial reasons	3
Personal effort	4
Transportation	1
Total	23

Note: Some persons gave more than one response.

The "Work-related" category in Table 15 included two young men who got jobs and quit because the money seemed attractive at that time. The third man was older and married with children. He has a seasonal job and can only come to classes in the winter. He found the waitlist at the college frustrating because he was only admitted in January, but was ready to go to school in November. He is a Grade 6 dropout of the school system in another province. He had tried to attend ABE once before but then there were two barriers: the fees; and transportation, as he lives 20 miles out of town. He was a likeable person and said he was good with men. He was in line for promotion, but needed to improve his literacy skills in order to handle the paperwork. Another man was on shift work and had to quit because of it. One woman quit classes because she could not handle work, school, a two year old and her own fear. Her choice was the job.

The "Program-related" reasons were: individual difficulties with subject matter (math); instructional strategy ("too much on my own, I wanted more explanation and blackboard work"); and conflict with instructor on course. These three reasons were given by Native men. One had gone to a regular community college ABE course while the others had gone to courses designed for Natives on the reserves. The one who had been to community college felt more at home in the drop-in learning centre where he could get individual help. One of the other men was participating in a pilot program and really liked the program as he knew he was making progress. He proudly told the writer that he had learned to tell the time, and took off his watch to show her the proof. (He had only gone as far as Grade 4 and was not interested in school when he was young.)

"Personal, family and health problems" included pregnancy, child's ill-health, parent's ill-health, death and personal relationships. Alcoholism and drugs were specifically mentioned as reasons for quitting. The former by a Native and the latter by a white. Both were males. (Two other males admitted to alcoholism or drinking in their past, but had put it behind them in marriage.) The one with the alcoholism problem currently was in trouble with the courts, and was obviously scared about what was going to happen. He had been in ABE Fundamental as recently as a couple of months prior to the interview. He would have liked an AA group on campus for support. His common-law wife was also an alcoholic so that did not help him. He wanted to be a carpenter. He had six children to provide for from his two wives and was "stressed" because he could not do so.

The "Personal effort" group of reasons were an interesting mix. Two came from the same young man who had been allowed into ABE first as a teenager (16 years) and later had returned to ABE night classes. In the first instance he had "a hard time keeping up" and as he was a fee-payer, he quit. The second time he was also working and "spreading himself too thin." This man had been taken out of Grade 2 in school by his parents and had learned at home. He had some practical trade skills and was very useful as a tradesman in his community, but needed to get his "ticket". He was about to try to get that through upgrading with his employer's support. The other comments in this category included: "I need time for myself now and again," and the interesting excuse - "I can't get up in the mornings. I'm not alert until 1 p.m. I've always been like that.". This man showed up at 4 p.m. for his interview which had been scheduled for earlier in the day!

The "Financial reasons" included quitting ABE so "UIC was not lost." Two Natives - one male, one female - were now participating in programs, but had tried ABE several years ago and quit. The man said that his band did not offer enough money to pay for all the costs of attending college - living allowance, fees, transport and books. Other bands in the region were more generous. So, he quit and went fishing. The woman had had similar problems. She said "the necessary supports have to be in place."

The "Transportation" problem was also mentioned by a Native woman. She was a single parent living in a native village a few miles out of town, and there had been some local dispute about use of buses and while this was on, she could not go to school. At that time she was ineligible for social assistance because of her age. However, a year later she got band sponsorship and was able to continue in ABE when the transportation problem was solved.

Discussion

Apart from the "Program-related" and "Personal effort" reasons, interviews with this population suggest that the reasons for withdrawing are similar to the deterrents or barriers to participation faced by many of the nonparticipants. These withdrawals have to be admired for their resilience and their continuing attempts to follow and believe in their dreams. The fact that so many return to ABE or intend to return shows that ABE does have an attraction for those who know about it and have tried it.

The Doukhobor subgroup and the learning disabled group illustrate two different problems facing ABE - the hard program decisions that have to be made when adequate program funds are not available; and the need for more specialized facilities and personnel to cope with special populations. Are these people dropouts, or victims of other circumstances?

The difficulty in obtaining data and in deciding what constitutes dropout are problems which plague researchers, but there needs to be more discussion within the college system as to what constitutes "success" and "attrition" in the ABE literacy context. Definitions of terms are crucial if they are to influence policies and practice.

THE TELEPHONE SURVEY OF DROPOUTS

The Invergarry Learning Centre of Surrey School District consented to be part of this project as staff were keen to get some answers themselves to their "turnover problem". The Centre said its total intake for day and evening classes for the September to December 1989 period was 213. They estimate an overall loss of 40 percent of enrollees. They knew the reasons for about 15 percent but the other 25 percent had left without notification. It was this 25 percent that formed the telephone target sample.

In that it is situated in a suburban area with a highly motivated working immigrant population, it was felt that the target sample would not be as transient or mobile as perhaps other areas in the Greater Vancouver Region. Invergarry has a unique approach to literacy training as described elsewhere, (Thomas, 1989a). The uniqueness of this approach comes through in the findings of the telephone survey which are now presented.

RESULTS - REASONS FOR DROPOUT

Thirty-seven people were interviewed. As with the Camosun College nonregistrant target sample, many people had disappeared or could not be reached. However, perhaps because this target sample was of more recent date than the Camosun one, the attrition of the target sample was less. Table 16 shows the disposition of the target sample.

TABLE 16. Withdrawals from the Invergarry Learning Centre Literacy Program (N = 54)

Item	N	%
a. Number not in service	7	13
b. Not known at that number	3	6
c. Not reached after 3 tries	6	11
d. Moved away	1	2
e. Entry to another program	6	11
f. Work-related reasons	13	24
g. Family-related reasons	5	9
h. Dissatisfaction with program	4	7
i. Other	5	9
j. Multiple reasons	4	7
	54	99

Presumably, twenty-one percent of this population had moved away (Number not in service, Not known at that number and Moved away). Of the six persons who had been accepted into another program, three were going to King Edward Campus of Vancouver Community College, two were going to Kwantlen College and one was going to another Surrey School District program.

Work-related reasons

Among the remaining 31 persons interviewed, the most often quoted reason for withdrawing was work-related. One woman was on unemployment insurance benefits which had just come through from another province where she had been working and she was now actively looking for work. Some of the respondents were holding down two jobs so scheduling and lack of time were problems. Some people had lost their jobs and were trying to find replacements. Other persons worked irregular shift hours so could not count on a regular time each week for classes; others worked overtime; and still others received and accepted a job offer.

Family-related and other reasons

This population sample had many new Canadians. Family-related reasons for withdrawing included: the arrival of close relatives from the home country for a visit or extended stay; the departure for a visit to the home country to get over a depression; and, deaths of family members in another province. Other reasons included: daycare problem; trying to get landed immigrant status; health problems such as surgery, cancer, and depression because of a job lay-off; and, lack of time because life was just too hectic before Christmas.

Multiple reasons

This category includes those responses which overlapped two or more of the categories. Two respondents were young mothers who were trying to juggle school work, part-time shift work and family responsibilities. In addition, one had had open-heart surgery followed by 'flu. The other woman said that she had run out of ideas for writing and wanted to work with books. She had enrolled in a night course at a local high school. One respondent gave mixed answers. He said he dropped out because he was too busy, but when questioned about the program he said it was relaxing and he became lazy. He wanted specific exercises or specific topics to research, for example biographies of famous Canadians. He said he intended to go back some time. At the time of the interview he was enrolled in a night school bookkeeping course for small business. He had attained a Grade 10 level at school, but was "pushed on" and said he had difficulties in spelling, pronunciation and writing large words. He said he was at a Grade 5 or 6 English level. Another man gave mixed answers which were job and family-related.

Program dissatisfaction

Of the four respondents who were dissatisfied with the program, one said she wanted to work on her spoken English and grammar. Her conversational needs were not being met by the emphasis on writing. She had another course in mind. Another woman also wanted grammar and a more structured course. She had found a course more suited to her needs. Both of these women were in the ESL category.

The two men who were dissatisfied gave different answers. One felt the course was "too easy", not challenging enough, nor interesting. He wanted more individual attention and less writing. He said he spent a long time sitting waiting for help before anyone came to him. He also wanted reading to be integrated with the writing. He suggested reading sections of a book and then writing a paragraph about it, was more what he wanted. This man was a day class attender on income assistance and had been in a special school up to Grade 4 but had a Grade 10 diploma. He had originally enrolled to improve his reading and spelling. The other respondent said that he did not do his writing homework before he went to class, and thus felt he was wasting his time in class. He had enrolled at B.C.I.T. in a quasi-trades course which did not require a Grade 12 certificate.

Intention to return

The answers to the question "Would you go back to the program?" were revealing. If the "Moved away" categories (a, b, d in Table 16), the "Not reached" (c), and the "Entry to another program" (e) category are subtracted, the number of respondents left is 31. However, of this total, a further 5 respondents from (h) and (j) were either already enrolled (4 persons) or intended to enrol (1 person) in other programs. Of the remaining 26, one respondent indicated that he had borrowed some books and was working on his own between his shift work. That left 25 respondents of whom 22 said they would go back.

Six of the women indicated they would return very soon. One of these had just enrolled before Christmas when festive preparations intervened, but she was very enthusiastic about the program. Four of the other women had been affected by either serious health problems or family problems which had taken them out of B.C., and the sixth woman had had family from Europe staying with her.

Three of the women and three of the men were definitely in the ESL category and at least two of these may have had some difficulty understanding the questions. However, two of the women said they would go back "later" when they were not so busy with the children. Two other women specifically mentioned daycare as a problem, especially for women with children who are not potty-trained. A free babysitting service on the school site would be appreciated by these women. Two of the ESL men had some difficulty with the question - they said they would go back if there was more emphasis on conversation. One man did not want to commit himself because "I may want to go back or go to university," but, if "I thought about the classes, I'd go."

Five of the remaining men were all very positive about the program and said they would like to return if time and work permitted. One thanked the writer for calling and showing an interest in the students. This courtesy was extended by some of the women as well, and one said she should have phoned and apologized for not coming to classes. One woman said the program had really been a positive experience: "My self-esteem has been perked." "I would go back again." This woman had had negative school experiences in another province and the school "pushed her through." She had a Grade 12 diploma, but needed help with reading, writing and spelling. Her reading experience had been through "memorization." Another woman said that her attendance had been her first experience of an adult school and that she really enjoyed it. It was good to know that there were "people with the same problem." This woman also had a Grade 12 certificate, but had reading problems. Nevertheless she was taking time to read to her 11 month old daughter at night.

Nearly all of these respondents were impressed with the program and the teachers. There was one wistful woman, a widow, who had attended the evening classes, and said that "the teachers need to rotate and encourage the shy ones to ask questions." She felt that "the teachers" were very busy with some students and not the others. She also suggested a 10 to 15 minute social break would be useful so that people could discuss things and get to know others in the class. Also, the break would help the students to make better use of the time in class: "The mind wanders if it's just on a book." A computer group for the early 40s age group was also suggested.

Other comments

Eight of the respondents said that they only went once to the Centre for an initial interview. This writer would question whether such persons could really be considered withdrawals. The Centre, however, considered them registered and expected them to attend classes, so nonattendance was looked upon as a program withdrawal. This definition was honoured for purposes of the survey.

Eight people said they found out about the program through school district advertising - brochures, booklets, flyers - on a door-to-door basis. Seven knew of the program through friends or relatives. Two learned about the program through community means - a local high school, a multicultural community meeting.

Only two or three of the respondents mentioned that they were on income assistance. One was a mother who recognized the limited ability of two of her three children, but thought education and trying hard were important. The fact that the courses were free was very important to her. This was the only time a cost factor was mentioned in this survey.

DISCUSSION

Although this sample represented 25 percent of the people apparently lost to the program in the fall semester (September to December, 1989), it can be debated whether that is really the case. Bosma (1988) cites two problems with "compilation of reasons" surveys related to attrition: students may not be aware of the real reasons for dropout; students may be reluctant to share many of their real reasons. Yet this writer feels that of the 37 contacts made, people were honest. Only three gave rather "mixed messages" regarding withdrawal. Another person was rather "testy", and hesitant to express his real feelings in case he went back to the program. There were four people whom the writer thought had difficulty in speaking English and may not have understood the intent of the survey. However, if they did not recognize the name of the Centre, the words "school," "reading and writing," and "Mark" (the name of the literacy coordinator/instructor) brought recognition. The writer's assessment is that except for the above reservations, people expressed themselves freely.

The level of dissatisfaction with the program itself is low. It would appear that the program serves as a useful bridge or stepping-stone for a small group of students who can then go on to college programs when vacancies occur. Only six people expressed any kind of dissatisfaction with the program. Another one made suggestions for improvement and intended to return. Of the six, five had found or were searching for a program to meet their immediate needs. Thus, one could conclude that they were capable of directing their own learning activity. There were 25 non-program-related reasons for withdrawal. If the "moved aways" are added, this number is increased to 36. Further, it seems reasonable to suppose that of the six who gained entry into other programs, some may have continued in the Invergarry program if they had not been accepted into the others. It has also been reported that those who did withdraw have positive feelings about the program and intend or would like to return to it when circumstances are different.

These two findings - non-program-related reasons for withdrawal, and positive program attitudes on withdrawal, corroborate those found by Cramer (1982) and Meyer (1974) as cited in Bosma (1988). Of the reasons often quoted as being pertinent in dropout - transportation was not mentioned at all by this group, and as previously noted, cost was only mentioned once in an inverse way. (As school district ABE classes are tuition-free, this particular barrier has been removed.)

Implications

As the population in this program is heavily immigrant-based and as the program has a unique approach to literacy training, some thought may need to be given to more careful explanations of the program. ESL students requiring oral conversation and grammar need to have a different program. While the writing road to literacy appears to be enjoyed by far the large majority of attendees, the strategies suggested by some of the "dissatisfieds" to help them with their writing are worthy of consideration. As is known, there is a strong element of social contact in learners' motivations for attending programs. This element should not be ignored. Many immigrants may need the extra little bit of socializing to compensate for lack of family and close friends in their new country. The woman who wanted a social break suggested that the students could contribute to the snacks. Socio-cultural sharings of experience could prove useful and provide further material to stimulate writing.

VI. PROJECT IMPLICATIONS - DISCUSSION

RESEARCH

As stated in the introduction, this project was conceived in the hope that it might lead to some suggested solutions and development of new strategies to the perceived problems of nonparticipation and attrition. From a research perspective, this writer feels that this project has only begun to open up these topics. The exploratory nature, the small samples, and the short time-frame of the project have not provided a solid quantitative base for administrative decision-making across the province.

However, the project was grounded in the field and the respondents, if not fully representative of that field, do provide us with glimpses of their present lives, their past experiences, their aspirations, their worries, and their attitudes towards education. They do represent a cross-section of a population which just happens to have as one unifying characteristic a low-level of formal education. There is an inherent danger in typecasting the target population based on that single characteristic. A recruitment thrust with a single message is unlikely to reach the bulk of nonparticipants any more than a single program delivery approach or any one instructional strategy can be applied to all adult participants. Program planners and practitioners have to work with the population they hope to serve.

Usual research paradigms may just not be applicable to this population as some of the literature reviewed may have suggested. To get to know more about the bulk of nonparticipants in the low-literate population may demand more in-depth experiences over a longer period of time. Ethnographic and phenomenological research approaches are likely more suited to this population than quantitative studies. The heterogeneity of the population together with varied socio-demographic and geographic factors make generalizations difficult. Research results in the United States are not necessarily applicable in Canada, but are useful in stimulating us to reflect on our own knowledge and praxis.

THE POPULATION AND TYPOLOGIES

Among the participants (Ps) and withdrawals (WDs) interviewed for this project, the six types as delineated by Beder and Valentine (1990) could all be recognized. That is not to say, however, that all people belonged to one of those six types. The Doukhobor women, for instance, exhibit many characteristics of "Mainstream Women", but are in fact part of a cultural minority with little or no education and probably have lower incomes than Beder and Valentine's group.

As Martin's typology (1987) was primarily based on financial means, several of his groups could also be recognized. The entrepreneurs in the present project, however, did not make the same level of income as in Martin's group. The other categories were all represented. What are we to make of this? Part of the difficulty is that in research "what is put in, is what comes out." Researchers have worked with different aspects of the problem and focussed on different variables.

The work on typologies with the adult undereducated population, however, is useful in acknowledging the heterogeneity of that population and shattering any myths about "sameness." There is a tendency, for instance to view all women in ABE as poor, single parents on income assistance beset by many difficulties and problems. While such women do exist, this project has shown that there are other women in the nonparticipant population who could be called resisters and among participants there are mainstream women. Hayes and Darkenwald's work (Hayes, 1988) is useful in emphasizing the differences between groups of women for recruitment purposes.

Among the nonparticipants, one may find many of the usually quoted barriers to participation, but the attitudes towards and the perceptions of ABE among this group may, it seems, be more important. We need to know more about the resisters. It is interesting to note, that when the ABE professionals were asked to give their reasons for nonparticipation of low-literate adults in programs, that only one or two mentioned low perceived need. (See Tables 6 and 7.) Their answers, like those of many practitioners are most likely shaped by their experiences with the population that enters programs. This population, by virtue of their entry, has perceived a need for training.

From a research point of view, it is difficult to find the low-literate population. Even when some people can be identified, this study has confirmed the transient or mobile nature of a considerable portion of the population. In addition, there are all the fears, anxieties, shame and embarrassment which have to be considered. The sensitivity of program coordinators in "not pushing the request" (for an interview), the "no shows" at interviews, the "drifting away" from the same, and repeated telephone calls and call-backs are all testimony to some of the difficulties.

Even among those who came to be interviewed there was fear. Two very different men in their 30s who lived in different parts of the province, volunteered to the writer at the end of the interview that they had been afraid. One said: "I was really nervous about coming here. I've never had a literacy interview before." (He was a withdrawal for this study, but currently participating in a program.) The other one said: "That wasn't so bad; when I came in here my knees were shaking." (This man was a nonparticipant.) Although interviewees knew their referrer, they did not know the writer. It took considerable courage and self-management for many of them to volunteer for and keep their interview appointments. Some were more obviously nervous than others. Some wanted to get all their bad experiences with school off their chests first, before other topics could be introduced. It is because of those experiences and reasons that different types of research approaches are needed for this population. In any case, it seems likely that there will always be a percentage of the population that will elude researchers completely.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Research implications which can be drawn from this project are:

1. The need for a continuing and improved Canadian research base to examine a whole range of issues related to the adult low-literate population.
2. Studies pertinent to British Columbia in particular need to be conducted if there is a serious intent to know more about whom provincial programs are trying to serve.

Some replication of U.S. research studies should be tried to compare their results with B.C. settings, for it is clear that socio-economic variables vary according to geographic and cultural conditions and thus affect results.

3. The more usual paradigms may not be applicable to this target population. In depth, qualitative kinds of work could be more useful. (Compare Fingeret, 1983; and Heath, 1980.)

PRACTICE

ISSUES

How can ABE serve its target population better? The problems and needs which have surfaced from talking with people during this project confirm many previous findings and suggestions and affirm many of the recommendations made in the Provincial Literacy Advisory Committee's Report (1989).

The issues which were highlighted for this writer during the current research project are as follows:

1. **Life circumstances of the individuals involved.** Many of the people interviewed had experienced chaotic life circumstances in the past. Early pregnancies, drugs and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, sickness, a series of foster homes, school problems, crime and so on. When people are under emotional, mental and economic stress, going back to school is the last thing on their minds. They are more likely to be concerned about where the next meal is coming from, or how they can obtain some new clothes for their children. They are at the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. One worker said; "It takes a lot of energy to be poor." Another said that many people "don't even know their welfare rights."

Large segments of the undereducated population were not tapped in this project -- the over 60 population, people with physical disabilities, people with psychiatric problems, older ESL immigrant groups, the incarcerated, to name some groups. Each of these groups, however, presents special needs and challenges to ABE practitioners. (See, for example, *Illiteracy and Older Canadians*, 1989.)

For those who are more representative of the people interviewed, however, it seems that either, everything in a person's life has to be almost in place to make it possible to enrol in a program, or (as suggested by another worker) things "have gotten so bad that perhaps education is seen as the last gamble to improve the odds, so it's worth the try." The difference in circumstances and attitudes could partially explain the differences between persisters and dropouts. Many of the WDs in this project for example, were people for whom circumstances were not right the first or second time round.

Agency workers confirmed that people have to "sort out their lives" before they can become students. They need goals, or at least, need to be willing to try and define goals for themselves before being referred to an educational upgrading program.

2. **Low self-esteem.** The fear, shame, anxiety and embarrassment expressed by participants and some others in this project, reveal that illiteracy is still a closet problem. Despite increased levels of general public awareness about the issue, the people whom practitioners aim to reach are likely not being reached. Apart from the odd brochure, or flyer, those who were actually in programs for the most part found out about them by word-of-mouth, and mainly through agency workers. When one's life is in "emotional shreds" or one "is wallowing in self-pity" or one is in constant fear of "being found out" or of being "publicly embarrassed", any messages about learning to read or returning to school are likely to pass over the heads of those for whom they are intended.

3. **Low perceived need.** For those not incapacitated by their low self-confidence, for the avoiders or resisters, school seems irrelevant to their needs and life-style. Some of this perception is shaped by their past school experiences. Going to ABE for them is not seen as anything different from the past. They hated school, or had problems in school which were ignored or not detected; so, why would ABE be anything different? They have no new reference point. In many cases, people in this group have made it on their own - either successfully, or sufficiently well to confirm for themselves that school is irrelevant in their lives. Many low-literate, married women, especially in rural areas, accept their lot and are conditioned to their way of life. These women may only come to ABE should their life circumstances change through divorce or death, for example. Then they are driven by economic need.

4. **The long haul.** Many who perceive that education could be useful for them are deterred by the long haul required to reach any significant level of

achievement (often interpreted as Grade 12). They are afraid of failing or being setback, of discouragement, of expectations that will not be realized, of poor results. Coupled with these fears is the knowledge that "literacy does not guarantee a job" [or a better job]. The option of being better off staying where one is, is thus rationalized. For many people in this group, the reference point again is their past school experience, but perhaps they have not been as independent or as successful in life as others and know that a higher education is the key to better life-circumstances. But, they can not see it applying to themselves. Among this group are people who regret having dropped out of school.

5. **More programs.** This project has confirmed the need for both more programs and a wider variety of program approaches. There are parts of this province which do not have literacy programs. Isolated small towns and rural areas fall particularly into this category. People cannot participate if there is nothing for them to participate in, or they cannot get into a program because of waitlists and a limited number of sponsorships. Many Native communities are particularly isolated and in need of literacy training opportunities.

6. **Different programs.** Many people interviewed found the idea of one-to-one tutoring appealing. These people tended to be older, working, or had specific learning difficulties. For some, it was the flexibility of the arrangement which appealed. For others, it was the privacy, especially where someone was well-known in the community. Still others wanted it because they thought it would provide the individual attention to specific learning needs. Tutoring is also seen as a bridge to other programs.

Within existing literacy classes, the importance of individual help and working at one's own pace was emphasized. In some situations, more tutors, peer help, or aides are needed to give the extra attention to students so they do not get bored or frustrated and leave the program.

Many people liked the idea of a "one-stop" centre, or a "drop-in" where they could get information and counselling, assessment, and extra tutoring help if needed. The latter would supplement part-time classes at an institution or one-to-one tutoring in a matched pair. The "extra tutoring" request came from people who were impatient and frustrated with the slowness of their progress because of limited hours in instruction. Such centres are also requested by those who work irregular shifts and cannot commit themselves to regular classroom hours. In these centres, there would be other learners or ex-learners to act as peer tutors or counsellors and mediators for the potential students. These "mentors" or "buddies" would befriend potential students, tell them how the system worked, and, in these ways, impart courage and self-confidence. "We know what it's like, because we've been there," is the attitude.

Such drop-in or storefront centres are particularly needed in towns where the college campus is located outside the downtown and there are problems of transportation. A storefront has the added advantage of doing its own advertising, just by being there. It is much easier to open the door of a building that one can see into and ask what they do, or ask for help. While the writer was visiting a Vancouver storefront, a huge 6-foot plus man walked in and asked whether this was the place where he could get some tutoring. (The program, unfortunately, had to close for a few weeks, until the next round of funding arrived.) For many in the downtown eastside, King Edward Campus of Vancouver Community College is "foreign territory" according to one agency worker.

The appreciative acceptance of Life Skills is a testament to their importance for many in the target population. Where such do not exist, pre-employment type programs such as Job Action courses and Employment Orientation for Women (EOW) may act in a similar way to enhance people's self-esteem and confidence.

7. **People with learning disabilities.** This is a definite subgroup within the target population. Some adults went through their school experience not knowing they had a disability, but knowing that they had problems with learning. Other adults had their problems detected, but nothing was done for them in school. The usual college placement tests are not sufficient to detect specific disabilities. Apparently, there are very few community diagnostic and assessment centres for learning disabled adults. Several of the interviewed adults had gone to the Capability Centre in Victoria for diagnosis. This Centre is unique and struggling for funds. Other adults had had to make use of local school board special services.

Adults with learning disabilities who were participating in programs made special pleas for different instructional strategies, the use of auditory and visual techniques in learning, more individualized help, and work with computers. These adults also need support networks and advocates. The Association of Learning Disabled Adults (ALDA) is trying to offer this kind of help to people who need it.

8. Trades training, or the next step. This was another major issue and of concern to many of the participants and others. It is of particular concern in the smaller centres where job opportunities are already limited. Many participants have returned or come to ABE so they do not have to be chambermaids, dishwashers, and loggers for the rest of their lives. Yet they see the credentials for trades and other jobs being made higher and more complicated, and wonder if they are "shut out" before they start. The current emphasis of the financial support system through MSSH is on employability. Some people from the smaller centres said they needed a job training centre where specific employable skills for which there was a demand could be taught. Aspects of carpentry, plumbing, electrical and mechanical trades could perhaps be taught without the full apprenticeship or trades training, especially in areas where there is a demand for skilled tradesmen. One man said, "I would really like to work. They have employment training programs for people on UIC, but nothing for people on social assistance."

Camosun College's Basic Vocational Skills Development program was quoted as a useful model by some of the adults interviewed.

9. Bureaucratic hassles. Many interviewees and participants railed against the system. There were one or two who had been caught up with the loss of unemployment benefits because they had returned to school. There were others who felt their workers tried to be superior and treated them in a demeaning and insensitive manner. Many of the men commented that single women with children get a better deal. They all seemed to know someone with fewer dependents than themselves who were receiving more money. The emphasis on goals and employability worried others. "You have to have a goal. How do I know what my goal is? That's why I want to come to school," said one man. "You can't get any support from welfare after Grade 10," said someone else. Many people did not seem to know that they could get bus passes, daycare subsidy and a clothing allowance if they needed it. It seems that if they do not ask the questions they do not get the answers. Changes in government policy add to the confusion. Many financial assistance workers and rehab officers receive limited training for their jobs. Training is really on-the-job. Additional training may prepare workers to be more sensitive towards students and potential students.

10. **Support issues.** For single women with children daycare is a problem. No single men with children were interviewed, but the case of the househusband suggests daycare could be a problem for such men. The problems are availability and affordability. Many women are not as aggressive as the men and need confidence-building courses and self-assertiveness training. Many who have been abused, bereaved or separated have to sort out their emotions and rebuild their lives. Counselling support and advice is required.

People interviewed also asked for more counselling support and help in the transitions from one program to another. Such bridging points were seen to occur on entry, on transfer between community-based programs (one-to-one or drop-in centres) and college programs, on transfer from low-level literacy classes to higher ABE classes, and in the transition from part-time classes to full-time classes.

11. **The school system.** Much of what the interviewees said about their past school experiences is useful in giving clues as to how ABE literacy programs should be different. Teachers must help children having difficulties in school. Sympathetic, trained teachers are needed to detect problems as soon as possible and give children the individual help that is required. Different techniques are needed for these children. Study skill courses are needed. Many of the parents felt that their children were headed the same way as themselves and they were trying to intervene. The "sight" method and "memorization" were often mentioned as being the only ways children were "learning to read". The parents are concerned. Behavioural problem children who are now adults suggested good alternate schools were required to motivate "problem" children to learn and help them back into the mainstream.

Summary

The above issues may not appear to have much to do with recruitment and retention per se. Yet, at a deeper level, they have everything to do with recruitment and retention. For, if the general environment, the needs and attitudes of the target population are not known, how can ABE hope to reach and retain its population?

SOME SOLUTIONS

The participants in the project were not at a loss in making suggestions as to how to recruit adults and keep them coming to programs.

RECRUITMENT

Advertising

Nearly everyone suggested that more advertising would help. In many instances, however, it was local advertising that was meant. Comments made were "I didn't know this place existed," "People don't know," "They don't advertise this place," "Lots of people want to continue their school," "This is the last place to get a second chance. Where else can you go?"

On a wider scale, radio, television and posters were suggested. A toll-free number was seen as being "O.K., if there is constant advertising and follow-up." Someone suggested a catchy song or jingle which would stay in people's minds. Someone else suggested the message, "Take a Second Chance - Think about it."

Some people had some reservations: They thought "the grapevine" was more important, or door-to-door advertising. Others said that advertising was alright but people have to be motivated or acknowledge the problem first and then take steps to help themselves. One person said, "Advertising does not live up to its promises."

In the smaller towns one aspect of advertising a one-to-one tutoring program was mentioned. Where the client wants and expects confidentiality, the client should have the right to know ahead of time who the volunteer tutor is to be, so that if he or she is known to the client, there is the option of refusal. Recruiting people in isolated rural areas, logging camps and fishing areas needs some thought. Use could be made of Northern Native Broadcasting to reach reserves.

Different messages for motivational purposes within different segments of the target population have already been mentioned. For nonparticipants who do not perceive the need or are put off by the long haul, a message geared to the differences in ABE from regular school might work. There is some evidence that nonparticipants' avoidance is based on their own past negative school experiences. Their emphasis on Grade 12 also indicates that they do not necessarily have a good understanding of ABE opportunities.

Family and peer support are often essential to give potential students the courage to take the first step.

Beyond advertising

Recruitment goes beyond the message. In the words of the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs (1987):

> Recruitment is the responsibility of every member of the community college. Everyone with whom a student comes in contact will have an impact on him/her, and this contact can sustain or destroy a prospective student's motivation for joining the program. All staff . . . are responsible for making ABE or GED students feel comfortable and a part of the educational setting. (p. 9-10)

While this quote was from a report on Native ABE, its message is applicable to the general ABE population. Some sensitivity training or orientation should be given to all front-line workers. Continuing communication between instructors and students is also necessary.

In an ABE self-study, Camosun College found that students wanted more orientation to the college and its programs in order to understand the system. Many of them did not know that extra help was available after class, nor did they know about EIC entry policies, college calendars, program brochures, career advising tapes and so on. Even more astounding was the finding "that 33 percent of students did not know that they had been tested!" (*Adult Basic Education Program Review*, 1988, p. 69).

This lack of awareness is quite common among the target population, and is a stark reminder to all practitioners not to take knowledge of information for granted. Vital information probably needs to be repeated frequently.

The programs

Programs need to be as varied and as flexible as possible. They need to be held in a variety of accessible locales and with flexible scheduling to encourage attendance by those who work odd shifts and are seasonal employees.

Courses should be mounted on Native reserves where there is an expressed need. Where the college is too far removed from the area of need, or transportation is a problem, courses should be offered in storefront learning centres in accessible city or downtown locations.

Bridging opportunities as provided by one-to-one tutoring programs and learning centres are required to help students make the transitions to more regular programs.

Waitlists need to be eliminated and there needs to be continuing contact with those on the list so that they know someone cares and has not forgotten about them.

In smaller centres, an instructor/coordinator cannot be expected to handle all courses. Additional help in the form of aides or tutors is required if there are low-level literacy people in the class.

More telephone tutoring or student hotlines were requested by some of the men who were or had been in programs in isolated areas and had tried to use home-study courses.

Programs which offer Life Skills and Job Training along with literacy training have also been mentioned. Simple courses in bookkeeping and managing one's own business might be appropriate and appealing to those with marketable talents and hobbies.

RETENTION

To address the problem of attrition/retention adequately province-wide requires some serious discussion on the use of terms. Has someone "dropped out" if he/she only came to one meeting? What about the stopouts, or "drop-ins"? What if specific short-term needs were met and the person "disappears"? This could be an unknown success story, but would likely be registered as "withdrawn". Is dropout a function of length of time and attendance, or is it a function of met needs?

The attrition rates in the college ABE literacy programs seem lower than one would have expected. Perhaps this could be explained by the fact that most people are under some kind of sponsorship and are encouraged to remain there until some identifiable goals have been met.

The turnover is likely greater in school district programs. One instructor/coordinator of a large school board said that she had noticed two things - the great increase in enrollments with the abolition of fees, but subsequent decline in numbers. The interpretation was that people were curious to see what was offered and when they realized it meant work and a commitment, they left. Another observation was that school district programs provide a training ground while people wait to get into college programs. This was seen to be the case with a small sample of the Invergarry withdrawals. The curiosity-seekers can be an extra load on instructors and staff. Some people have suggested that a small registration fee deters those who are not really serious and is evidence of a commitment. At least two of the people interviewed suggested a fee. One said it would "get rid of the free-loaders." The other felt the demonstration of commitment was important. The registration fee is not the same as a tuition fee.

In a one-to-one program, coordinators may wish to discuss the pros and cons of the strategy reported by Diekhoff and Diekhoff (1984) of a waiting period after people have telephoned for an interview, in order for self-screening to take place.

We know that life circumstances and personal characteristics affect people's ability to persist in class. Practitioners may be powerless to affect the life circumstances of their students, but friendly follow-up calls and expressions of interest may help to keep learners motivated and encourage them to return when circumstances change.

Within the classrooms themselves, caring instructors and instructional strategies matter most. Students needs, wishes and expectations should be known and how those might be met through an individual learning plan and group activities needs to be explained. Students need to work on tasks which are relevant to them and in ways that are congruent with their own learning styles. Some students may need courses in study skills and time management. The differences between teaching academic literacy and stressing functional literacy tasks and needs for the ABE population have been researched and commented upon by Fagan (1990), and Hayes and Valentine (1989).

Appelson (1984) found that by combining a variety of techniques and strategies with different kinds of staffing, retention rates increased to 80 percent. Approaches included language experience, assisted reading, sustained silent reading, tape recorders, personal dictionaries, commercial materials, newspapers, pairing/peer instruction, group activities and games. Staff included instructors, counsellors and volunteer tutors working together to provide a supportive environment for learners.

Students need to know where they are going and how they are doing. Benchmarks and tracking procedures should be provided to assist learners in reaching realistic, attainable goals. Frequent encouragement and verbal strokes are needed so that learners feel progress is being made and their morale is boosted. Continual communication with learners is important and especially with the quiet, shy ones. Some of the latter are too diffident to ask for help, but this project has shown that some of them are unhappy when neglected.

When learners appear not to be making progress, adequate counselling and assessment help must be made available. Instructors and some tutors will need to have more specialized training to help adults with learning disabilities and special needs. Ross and Smith (1990) provide a multi-level service model for adult basic educators to serve learning disabled adults.

Such measures as those suggested above will help to retain those adults who enter ABE programs.

A PARTING COMMENT

As I write these words, I think of Daniel (not his real name) who was 32 years old and who told me he cried when he was doing his math - it was so difficult. He was Native and in a Native literacy program which also had a Life Skills component. This was a pilot program for Natives and its success was crucial to the program's continuance. The class supported each other. For the sake of those who were still to come, they wanted to succeed. They rallied round Daniel and encouraged him. He was making progress, but a little more slowly than the others and it seemed likely that he would have to go through the course a second time. This he was willing to do in order to complete the work necessary for his goal. Without that support Daniel would have been a dropout and one more person lost to ABE.

Practitioners may draw their own conclusions from the results and suggestions presented in this report. If there is something somewhere which strikes a responsive chord and causes reflection, or suggests another way of looking at or doing things, then the voices of the people interviewed will not have been raised in vain.

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APPENDIX A

Letter and Questionnaire to:

1. ABE Administrators, and
2. ABE Instructors.

Tel.

P.O. Box 6368, Sta. C
Victoria, B.C.
V8P 5M3

1989 10 04

To: ABE Administrators

Dear Colleague,

The Provincial Literacy Advisory Committee has commissioned a research project on The Reluctant Learner. This is a cost-shared venture between the National Literacy Secretariat and MAEJT.

The project has two thrusts:

a) to investigate reasons for non-participation in literacy instruction; and
b) to investigate causes of 'droppng-out' from all kinds of literacy instruction.

It is hoped that each thrust will have a complementary outcome, namely:

a) suggested initiatives/strategies for overcoming any identified barriers to participation; and
b) suggested solutions/strategies for ensuring student success.

I need your help. The project is due to be completed by the end of January. Please could you look over the attached questionnaire, and take time to fill it out for me at your ABE Meeting. PLease hand in your questionnaire to Norma Kidd before you leave. I have a travel budget for the project, so if you feel that it is worth visiting your college or communities in your college region to meet with learners, undereducated adults, instructors, tutors, support staff, etc. please say so. My home telephone number is at the top of the page. Should any of you wish to contact me, please feel free to do so. I have an answering machine, so messages may be left, if I am not at home when you call.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

Audrey

Audrey M. Thomas

encls.

THE RELUCTANT LEARNER

Name of respondent:____

Institution:____

Telephone number____

A. NON-PARTICIPATION

1. What do you think are some of the reasons for the non-participation of adults with low literacy skills in literacy programs?

2. In what ways do you think functionally illiterate adults compensate for their illiteracy?

3. Has your college done any research in this area? Yes _____ No_____

Are you familiar with any other studies on the topic? Yes ______No_____

If yes to either of the above, please give contact names and telephone numbers of persons involved in the research, and/or titles and publication details where possible.

4. a) Do you have an active learners' network in your college? Yes___No___

b) Would it be possible to come and talk to them: Yes___ No___

c) If so, whom should I contact?

d) Do you have suggestions of any other persons I should talk to about this topic? - e.g. individual learners, instructors, counsellors, social workers? If so, please list below.

Name	Category- learner, social worker etc.	Telephone or other contact

5. Any other comments or suggestions on the topic of non-participation? (e.g. research hints, suggested strategies for overcoming any 'barriers' to participation, etc.)

B. ATTRITION/RETENTION RATES

1. Do you have accessible data on student 'drop-out'/retention rates for your ABE literacy programs?

If so, whom should I contact for further information?

2. What do you think are some of the reasons for adults leaving adult literacy programs?

3. Do you know whether ABE 'drop-outs' in your programs, later come back to ABE and continue their learning?

4. What, in your view, is required to improve retention rates in ABE programs?

5. Please indicate in the space below, any further comments or suggestions related to the topic of attrition/retention.

6. In the space below, or on the back of this sheet, please list the names of any persons -learners, counsellors, admissions officers, coordinators, instructors etc that you feel it would be useful for me to contact and/or visit.

Tel.:
(answering machine in use)

P.O. Box 6368, Sta. C
Victoria, B.C.
V8P 5M3

1989 12 04

To: ABE Fundamental Articulation
Committee Members

Dear Colleague:

I am working on a research project entitled The Reluctant Learner. This is a cost-shared venture between the National Literacy Secretariat and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology.

The project has two thrusts:

a) to investigate reasons for non-participation in literacy instruction; and

b) to investigate causes of 'dropping-out' from all kinds of literacy instruction.

It is hoped that each thrust will have a complementary outcome, namely:

a) suggested initiatives/strategies for overcoming any identified barriers to participation; and

b) suggested solutions/strategies for ensuring student success.

I need your help. The project is due to be completed by mid-February. Please could you look over the attached questionnaire, take time to fill it out and return it to me as soon as possible or in any case, by January 12, 1990 at the latest.

Where your college is a multi-campus institution with multiple literacy classes or programs, including outreach volunteer tutor programs, I would appreciate your contacting your literacy colleagues to obtain the statistics for enrollment and withdrawal for the 1989 calendar year, however that is constituted. (I understand that some colleges have three 'terms' - September to December, January to March, April to June; while others have two semesters September to December and January to April; yet others may have other arrangements. I would like statistics for the full year January to December 1989 wherever possible.)

Should you wish to discuss these topics further. Please feel free to call me at the number at the top of the page. I shall be out of town in connection with the project from 11 to 15 December, and from 8th to 19th January, but you can reach me the week of 18th December, as well as the week of 1st January and after 19th January. Alternatively, messages can be left for me on my answering machine.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

Audrey M. Thomas

encls.

THE RELUCTANT LEARNER

Name of respondent:____

Institution:______________________Campus____________________________Program_______

Telephone number____

A. NON-PARTICIPATION

1. What do you think are some of the reasons for the non-participation of adults with low literacy skills in literacy programs? (See also p. 3.)

2. In what ways do you think functionally illiterate adults compensate for their illiteracy?

3. Has your college done any research in this area? Yes _____ No_____

Are you familiar with any other studies on the topic? Yes ______No_____

If yes to either of the above, please give contact names and telephone numbers of persons involved in the research, and/or titles and publication details where possible.

4. a) Do you have an active learners' network in your college? Yes___No__

   b) Would it be possible to talk with them? Yes___ No___

   c) If so, whom should I contact? (Name and phone number, please.)

   d) Do you have suggestions of any other persons I should talk to about this topic? - e.g. individual learners, instructors, counsellors, social workers? If so, please list below.

Name	Category- learner, social worker etc.	Telephone or other contact

5. Any other comments or suggestions on the topic of non-participation? (e.g. research hints, suggested strategies for overcoming any 'barriers' to participation, etc.)

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN ADULT EDUCATION

Following is a list of identified barriers to adult education programs. These are not literacy specific. Please look over the list, add any others which you feel may not be on the list, but which apply to literacy practice and then priorize the barriers which you perceive to be the greatest for potential learners in your college region. (I would like the top 10, but if this is difficult, the top 5 will do.) Please feel free to elaborate or make any comments at the side or on the back of this sheet.

Item

Importance

1. Financial (i.e. program & learner support)
2. Lack of coordination among agencies
3. Lack of support systems (day-care, orientation, counselling and assessment)
4. Lack of information (advertising/publicity)
5. Geographic barriers
6. Institutional practices (course offerings, entry restrictions etc.)
7. (Learner) fatigue
8. Lack of time
9. Attitudinal barriers
10. Fees and other costs
11. Scheduling
12. Curriculum/Learning Needs (inappropriate to clientele)
13. Employer's recruiting policies (credential requirements)
14. Residency requirements (n/a?)
15. Accreditation (of life experience)

Other

* Insensitivity of front-line college and government workers

* Pressure to complete within limited time frame

B. ATTRITION/RETENTION RATES

1. Please could you provide statistics for students enrolled in each of your literacy classses and/or programs for the 1989 calendar year, and the number of withdrawals, with reasons, if known. If this is too difficult because of overlaps or administrative difficulties, please give figures at least for September-December 1989.

Class/Program (Use back of sheet if necessary.)	September-December 1989		Other 1989 (Specify)	
	Enrolled	Withdrawn	Enrolled	Withdrawn
1.				
2.				
3.				

2. What are some of the reasons for adults leaving adult literacy programs?

3. Do you know whether ABE 'drop-outs' in your programs, later come back to ABE and continue their learning?

4. What, in your view, is required to improve retention rates in ABE programs?

5. Please indicate in the space below, any further comments or suggestions related to the topic of attrition/retention.

6. In the space below, or on the back of this sheet, please list the names of any persons -learners, counsellors, admissions officers, coordinators, instructors etc that you feel it would be useful for me to contact.

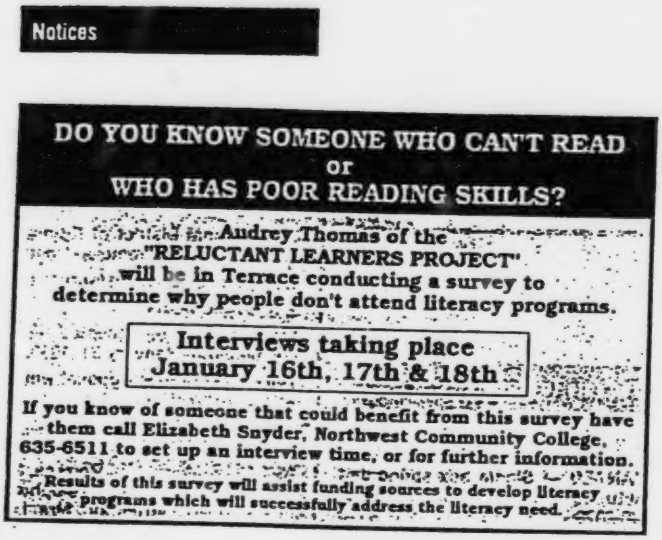
APPENDIX B

Samples of Attempts to Locate:

1. Nonparticipants, and
2. Withdrawals.

SAMPLE A.

NOTICE PLACED IN TERRACE WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS BY NORTHWEST COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Notices

DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO CAN'T READ
or
WHO HAS POOR READING SKILLS?

Audrey Thomas of the
"RELUCTANT LEARNERS PROJECT"
will be in Terrace conducting a survey to
determine why people don't attend literacy programs.

Interviews taking place
January 16th, 17th & 18th

If you know of someone that could benefit from this survey have them call Elizabeth Snyder, Northwest Community College, 635-6511 to set up an interview time, or for further information.

Results of this survey will assist funding sources to develop literacy programs which will successfully address the literacy need.

Terrace Review, January 3, 10, 1990

Terrace Standard, January 3, 10, 1990

Selkirk College

SAMPLE B.

January 10, 1990

Dear

Hi! Happy New Year!! I hope you are doing well. The reason I am writing you this letter is to ask you a favour.

On Wednesday, January 24, 1990, Audrey Thomas will be at the Centre. She is doing a project about former ABE students who aren't going to school anymore. She would like to talk with students to find out why they aren't going to school. She is willing to pay $10 for about one hour of your time.

I hope you are willing to come down to the Centre and talk to her. Please call me at   or drop by and talk to me. I hope you can help me out.

Thanks very much.

Yours sincerely,

APPENDIX C

Guides for One-on-One Interviews.

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR NON PARTICIPANTS

Introduce self and explain project.

1. Current status - employed (ft, pt, casual, seasonal, moonlighting)
   - unemployed
   - social assistance
2. What kind of things do you need to do which require reading or writing?
3. How do you manage? (fake it, get help from somebody)
4. Do you look at or read
   - newspapers? which sections?
   - magazines? which ones?
   - books? kind?
5. Do you write at all? (notes, letters, diary, do you have a chequing account?)
6. How is your spelling? (Problems)
7. How is your math?
8. Coping strategies?
9. Would you like to upgrade your skills?
   a) if yes, how could you see that happening?
   b) if no, why not?
10. Have you ever thought about going to a program?
11. Why have you not taken the first step? List barriers which apply.
    - lack of awareness of options
    - self-esteem
    - anxiety, fear of failure
12. What would make it easier for you to go to a program?
13. Perceived value of education - to you, for others, for children?
14. How much schooling have you had?
15. What was your school experience like? (repeated? socially promoted? in BC? other?)
16. How old were you when you left school?
17. Reasons for quitting?
18. How do you feel about your school experience now? Likes? Dislikes?
19. Age group? 18-29 30-44 45-60 over 60
20. Any other comments.

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR WITHDRAWALS

Introduce self and explain project.

1. How long were you in the program?
2. How did you find out about it?
3. What specifically made you go to the program?
4. How long did you feel the need to upgrade your education?
5. Had you been to any other programs or tried any other ways to upgrade your skills before going to this program?
6. Why did you stop going to the program? Elaborate (list factors).
7. What did you like about the program?
8. What did you dislike about the program?
9. How did you find:
   a) the college workers, reception/entry
   b) the instructors
   c) the other students?
10. What is needed to help people:
    a) to come to programs?
    b) to continue in programs?
11. What would have helped you in particular?
12. Would you go back to the program?
13. Age group
    18-29
    30-44
    45-60
    over 60
14. How far did you go in school? in BC? other?
15. What was your school experience like?
16. Literacy practices in home (radio and television habits).
17. Any other comments.

APPENDIX D

Telephone Survey of ABE Literacy Nonregistrants
- Interview Guide

January, 1990

NON PARTICIPATION

I.D.________________

Hello, my name is ____________________, I am doing some research for the Ministry of Advanced Education/Camosun College. I understand that you came to Camosun College to write an assessment test in (month) 1989, but did not register at the College. (Pause). Could you answer some questions for me?* What you say will not be identified with you, but your answers are important for us to help serve people better.

*'No' - thank them and try next person.
'Yes' - proceed with questions.

1. Could you tell me your reasons for taking the assessment tests at the College at that time? (To enter particular program? which? was referred by someone?)

2. Who referred you to the College?
   Self______ EIC____ MSSH______ WCB________ Other_______________

3. a) Did you try to register at the College? Yes______ No_______ (If No; go to 6.)

   b) If yes: Were you successful? Yes____ No_____
   (Yes: go to 4., No: go to 5.)

4. a) Which program/class did you enter? Where?

   b) Are you still going to class? If Yes, go to 10, If Withdrawn get reasons, then go to 10.

5. If you were not successful, what were the reasons?

   Waiting list__ Schedule (classes, work)______________________________
   Location of classes (transport/time problems) ________________________
   ____ (Go to 7)

6. If you did not try to register, could you tell me why? (Disappointed with results, financial problems, day care, work schedule, not ready, etc.)

7. Have you been to any other ABE (reading and writing programs)? Which ones?

8. Would you try to register at the college in the future? If No: go to 10. If Yes, when? 1990 _____ later_______________________

9. What would make it easier for you to come to the college?

10. Any other comments about what is required to help adults get their education?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP.

APPENDIX E

Learner Calls to the
Adult Literacy Contact Centre
(from March 1 to October 31, 1989 inclusive)

Information compiled by:
Sandy Middleton
Information Worker
Adult Literacy Contact Centre

Adult Literacy Contact Centre
A Project of the Adult Basic Education Association of B.C.

622 - 510 W. Hastings Street,
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 1L8

1-800-663-1293
684-0624

November 1989

LEARNER CALLS TO THE ADULT LITERACY CONTACT CENTRE

(March 1 to October 31, 1989 inclusive)

Special needs identified by callers to the Adult Literacy Contact Centre:

Learning Disabled Includes number of callers who think they may have a learning disability but have never been assessed (11) and number of callers who say they do have a learning disability and may have been assessed (13).	24
Mentally handicapped	2
Special emotional or psychiatric needs, including depression	3
Speech impediment	2
Hearing impairment	2
In need of daycare	13
On social assistance	7
Unemployed - looking for work and/or vocational counselling	15
Total	68
Total calls received March 1 - October 31, 1989 inclusive	203

__NOTE__: Information regarding special needs was given voluntarily and not solicited. Therefore, the number of special needs identified (68) may present an incomplete picture of how many people these categories actually represent.

Categories are not exclusive, but overlap.

Examples of callers to the ALCC and how they described their reasons for wanting to enroll in a literacy program:

- A man who works in a restaurant wants to improve his reading skills in order to become a waiter.
- A woman planning to take a course to be a sexual abuse counsellor is worried her reading and spelling skills will not be good enough to pass the course.
- A woman, who has always worked as a barmaid or chambermaid, wants to get out of what she describes as a "working ghetto".
- A woman who works full-time as a childcare worker wants to improve her writing skills because it "takes me so long to write a report."
- A man who has been working at the same company for years where an opportunity has come up, for the first time, to fill a steam engineer's position needs to get his ticket by next spring or the "chance will be lost". He needs help to pass the exam.
- A woman who, as a child, was "made to feel like a dummy", says "The fear when you can't read and write is overpowering - like being blind."

What callers to the ALCC have identified as barriers:

(1) Anxiety about attending classes:

   (a) the class will be full of people much younger than they are

   (b) they won't be able to keep up with the rest of the class

   (c) past failures in school will be repeated

Learners currently attending classes have commented on the following:

   (a) having to miss classes because of other obligations

   (b) inability to keep up with the rest of the class when classes are missed

   (c) not receiving enough individual attention from the instructor - instructor is "too busy"; instructor doesn't "pay enough attention to me" (school districts)

A woman attending a school district program dropped out and gave the following reasons.

The course required attendance two nights a week. She was forced to miss a number of classes because of other commitments in her life and demands on her time and she found herself falling behind.

The course was too hard for her. She "can't write worth a darn" and "Every time he talked about writing an essay I just about panicked." She sometimes couldn't understand what he was saying or follow his instructions - "what we were learning I was never taught."

There were too many students in the class (about 10) and the instructor - "it's not his fault" - was too busy to check her work.

(2) Lack of information - not knowing "what to do, where to go, where to turn, how to start"

(3) Not wanting anyone else to know

(4) Not wanting others to see "how stupid I am"

(5) "I'm too old to learn"

(6) Contact cannot be reached - "is never there when I call". Contact does not return phone calls when name and number left. (colleges, school district, and "community based" program)

(7) Contact insists on talking to the learner over the phone before making an appointment, rather than letting the spouse or friend of the learner make the appointment.

In a specific instance, the wife of a potential learner made the initial call to the instructor at a college. The instructor insisted on speaking to the learner before an appointment could be made although the learner's wife indicated that her husband has a speech impediment and dislikes having telephone conversations. Nevertheless, her husband did call but the instructor was not in her office at the time the call was made and the learner spoke to a secretary whom the wife described as rude and "snotty" to him. Both the husband and wife wanted nothing to do with the college after this experience and could not understand why the learner's wife was not allowed to make the appointment for her husband.

(8) Attitude among institutional staff:

A woman went to a community college to enquire about enrolling in a literacy program. She spoke to office personnel and was told that all their classes were full at the moment and also that before she could enroll she would have to be tested at some later date. The woman told me that the way the testing procedure was described frightened her and that the woman behind the desk at the college was curt and she felt embarrassed and humiliated - "I felt like a fool and went home and cried." She asked about financial assistance because she is unable to pay college fees, but couldn't understand what was said to her about the procedure for applying. This woman also attempted to reach the contact person for school district programs but was not put through and couldn't get any information - "no one would help me".

(9) No daycare or inability to pay for available daycare

A number of women with young children at home want to take correspondence courses or want a volunteer tutor because they are housebound but until September of this year there were no basic literacy courses offered through distance education.

(10) Shortage of volunteer tutor programs for those adults who are housebound and/or reluctant to attend a class.

(11) Lack of programs during the summer and difficulty in obtaining information about fall programs during the summer from colleges and school districts.

(12) Lack of programs in some small towns. In Dawson Creek, for example, a farmer has been unable to get help because there is no evening literacy program and no volunteer tutor program. (However, both the college and a private school are now investigating the possibility of starting a literacy program in the evening.)

What two learning disabled adults have said about special education classes in colleges:

(1) "special" classes are really the same as regular classes - they just have a different teacher

(2) there are too many people in the classroom and I don't like having more than one teacher

(3) everybody learns at a different level and they're teaching at one level

(4) the class is too slow - working at one pace - and is holding me back

(5) classes don't offer anything I'm interested in

(6) I tried so many schools over and over - got depressed every time. After that, I quit, got fed up.

Other experiences by learning disabled adults:

(1) Institutions don't care, particularly social service agencies like welfare and legal aid and doctors. Legal aid's the worst. They treat welfare people differently from working people and also when they realize the low level of education an individual has they treat you differently. They make you feel I'm a nobody. I'm a nothing. A lot of uneducated people are intelligent but not persistent and when they hit a roadblock they can't get past it and they give up. People don't come forward because they're ashamed. If you're uneducated, you're not socially acceptable. You really feel it from all parts of society. You can't find out where to go to get help. I used to look in the mirror and wish that I had a physical handicap. People used to expect so much more of me than I could give because my disability was invisible.

(2) The following story was related by the wife of a severely learning disabled man who was assessed as dyslexic when he was a child.

The learner's wife made the initial call and spoke to the literacy instructor at a community college. She told the instructor about her husband's learning disability and inability to read and an appointment was made for her husband to see the instructor at the college. The learner's wife told me that, during the interview, her husband was asked to repeat the same information she had already given the instructor over the phone. She then said,

> "J. wasn't in there very long and then he came out and said they couldn't help him. They were going to test him but J. said 'I can't read this' and they said there was no point in going further. It's a letdown when you go all the way up there and then you're turned away."